

# Host Organisation Perspectives on the Impacts of International Volunteering

**Cosmopolitan Development:**

The Impacts of International Volunteering Project Findings Part 2

December 2016



# Acknowledgements

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project was generously funded by an Australian Research Council's Linkage Projects grant (Project Number LP120200085). It involved Scope Global (formerly Austraining International) as the Industry Partner. Scope Global manages international development, education and volunteer programs to enable positive change through building the capacity of people, organisations and communities in developing countries.

The Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore and the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester contributed funds and/or in-kind support.

We would also like to thank all the research participants who volunteered their time and actively embraced the project.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Australian Research Council, Scope Global, or the Universities involved.

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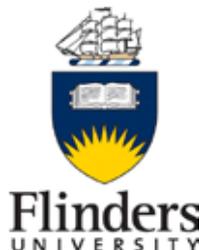
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**ISBN 978-1-925562-03-3**



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Research Council**



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research sought to capture the distinctive contributions of international development volunteerism (IDV) to development assistance and people-to-people links. It asked:

1. How does IDV enable the building of development partnerships?
2. To what extent does IDV produce or consolidate cosmopolitan orientations in volunteers and host organisations?

## NEED FOR THE RESEARCH

IDV has been a part of bilateral aid programmes since the 1960s but there has been relatively limited research on its impacts. The existing literature suggests that IDV has mainly beneficial capacity development and public diplomacy impacts but that these are difficult to measure through commonly used development indicators. In Australia, a commissioned review of the government funded volunteer program came to a similar conclusion but identified a tension between capacity development and public diplomacy objectives. This research project set out to find ways of evaluating the impacts of IDV programs, including the more intangible relational impacts that are increasingly recognised as being important to achieving transformational change. It focuses on the case of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program, specifically the part of the program managed by Scope Global, the industry partner in this project.

## CONTEXT OF THIS REPORT

To gain an understanding of the impacts of international development volunteers from the host organisation's (HO) point of view, we held workshops, conducted a survey and interviewed staff working in organisations that hosted AVID volunteers. We also examined end of assignments reports completed by HOs.

The surveys were collected at workshops held with HOs at the start of our fieldwork in Cambodia, Indonesia, Solomon Islands and Peru. The survey data is limited in its usability for the following reasons:

- The number of respondents (less than 50) makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions.
- All respondents were self-selected as they comprised HO workshop participants and hence probably represent only the views of those HOs interested in the research.
- Despite translation into local languages, the results may be compromised by the respondents' understanding of the questions (as indicated by the number of questions being skipped and written responses).
- There is only a partial overlap between those surveyed and those we interviewed.

HOs complete end of assignment reports to assess the volunteer placement. Although this is a requirement, only a few comply. These reports vary considerably in the depth and detail provided around the impact of the volunteer on the organisation. At the time of conducting this research 18 of these reports were available. For these reasons the survey data and the end of assignment reports are only used as a point of reference for the richer and more nuanced findings from the qualitative interviews.

The main source of information for this report is interview data collected from HOs based in Cambodia, Indonesia, Maldives, Peru and Solomon Islands. Here we present a preliminary analysis of this data.

## RESULTS FROM THE RESEARCH

Our analysis of survey and interview data suggests that volunteers are highly appreciated by host organisations as a means to develop their human resource capacity and organisational capacity, as an affordable source of expert knowledge, and as a way of internationalising their organisation. Most of the benefits identified by host organisations fit into two broad categories:

1. Knowledge acquisition – collecting, critically analysing, using skills and knowledge in framing ideas/issues/problems and exploring solutions which can potentially enhance the impact of development programs
2. Collaboration and networking within and beyond national boundaries and working in a global environment

The first important finding is that both HOs and volunteers are seen to benefit from volunteerism. This reciprocity of learning is an important feature of capacity development that is rarely captured. Where this reciprocity does not exist, capacity development is likely to be more limited and ongoing relationships are harder to build. A purely technical understanding of capacity building and a relationship focusing on skills transfer and task completion alone are seen as less beneficial by HOs. Recognising the dialogical nature of capacity development and giving due credit to HOs can help create a more equal relationship between HOs and volunteers.

A second finding is that the impacts and benefits of hosting volunteers depend on strong and positive relationships between the volunteer and the host organisation. Various factors are seen to influence this relationship, including the volunteer's and the HO's respective orientation, preparation and their mutual fit.

When HOs are able to integrate the volunteer into their everyday work and management practices, impacts are likely to be more beneficial and more sustainable. This suggests that it is important to build capacity within HOs to manage, monitor and evaluate their volunteers.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

International volunteering has seen significant growth in the 21st century. Much of this is due to the rising demand for international experience among young people from the Global North (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Jones, 2011; McBride & Sherraden, 2007; Tiessen & Heron, 2012). At the other end of the working lifespan, older adults with “a lifetime of experience” seek opportunities for productive aging (Lough & Xiang, 2016). Many volunteers who work in developing countries are motivated by the desire for a fairer and more equal world. They are encouraged by global development goals that propose the end of poverty and other injustices as something that is achievable within their lifetime, and to which they can directly contribute (Roy, 2010). Studies suggest that international volunteers contribute to the development of host communities in variety of ways that include technology and skills transfers, building local capacity and social capital, and enhancing community relations (Devereux, 2008; Sherraden, Lough, & McBride, 2008). International volunteering also provides opportunities for participants to gain the skills and sensibilities required for global citizenship and for promoting intercultural understanding. In the often technical process of development, it has the potential of offering “a far wider view of development as a new, and morally informed, vision of global responsibility” (Lewis, 2006, 661).

This study focuses on international development volunteerism (IDV) which forms part of bilateral aid. Such IDV programs have their beginnings in the 1950s development era but have only recently attracted the interest of academic researchers. They are supported through government aid budgets and typically involve longer term placements of four or more months for volunteers with professional skills and experiences that match the needs of host organisations working towards social change in developing countries. Australia’s IDV program is one of the oldest, with its roots in the Volunteer Graduate Scheme that began sending skilled graduates to Indonesia in the early 1950s. It was a by-product of the Colombo plan which aimed to strengthen economic and social development in the Asia-Pacific region through human resource development (Brown, 2011, 35). In 2011, the Australian government combined several existing programs under the umbrella of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID). The management of the program is tendered out and for the duration of this research project, Scope Global, the industry partner in this ARC Linkage research project, was responsible for managing around 70 per cent of the AVID volunteer placements (Office for Development Effectiveness, 2014).

IDV programs are under growing pressure at both the global and the national level. At the global level, a greater emphasis on making development assistance more accountable and more effective has led to a managerial approach to development that focuses on measurable, outcomes-based development indicators (Elbers, 2012). This carries the risk of devaluing the more intangible relational impacts of IDV programs and reshaping their meanings and outcomes (Georgeou & Engel, 2011; Lough & Allum, 2013). At the same time, the shift from donor-recipient relationships to partnerships in global development policy (OECD, 1996) provides a space for IDV programs to establish more equitable and mutually accountable relationships with organisations in a rapidly changing Global South (Schech, Mundkur, Skelton, & Kothari, 2015).

At the national level, governments in Australia and elsewhere have cut their aid budgets in recent years in response to changing global and domestic financial fortunes. The impact has been felt in terms of reduced resources available to support IDV programs and increased competition between organisations that manage IDV programs (Georgeou, 2012; B. Lough & Allum, 2013). This research was conducted in 2013-2014, a period marked by an Australian federal election and change of government which resulted in the disestablishment of the Australian Agency for International Development, the government agency responsible for the AVID program. Development assistance was incorporated into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade amidst significant policy adjustments and cuts to the aid budget (Ware, 2015). Part of the 2014 aid policy is to make development assistance responsive to national economic interests and foreign policy goals. In this context,

IDV programs are seen as a means of public diplomacy, which is to improve foreign relations and foster trade and investment. Defining IDV more broadly as part of people-to-people linkages in the context of a global civil society (Castells, 2008) may better grasp its potential to contribute to cosmopolitan citizenship and international solidarity by practicing intercultural communication and collaboration.

### **Volunteerism and capacity building**

Capacity development lies at the heart of International Development Volunteer programs. Recent research on volunteering (McWha 2011, Devereux 2008, 2010, Lough et al. 2010) has suggested that volunteers are ideally placed to engage in capacity development, as compared to other development actors such as consultants. Volunteers are perceived as being on a more or less equal footing with local staff in terms of income and power, have more time to develop relationships that facilitate mutual learning and challenging mindsets, and tend to work with resources that exist locally. The perception of volunteers as capacity developers has come to be inscribed in international volunteer programs funded through the foreign aid budget.

The recent evaluation of the AVID program stated that “helping to develop the capacity of host organisations is the major outcome sought by aid-funded volunteer programs”. Besides this central purpose, the AVID program was found to contribute to building “people-to-people links” and generating “goodwill for domestic and foreign diplomacy” (Office for Development Effectiveness, 2014, 12) Similarly, an evaluation of the Canadian government funded volunteer program reported positive impacts on the motivation, capacities and performance of developing country organisations and on Canadian expertise and capacity in international development CIDA, 2005. However, these capacity development impacts are difficult to measure, and not only in volunteer programs.

Development agencies, since the 1980's, have prioritised capacity development as a key aspect of their aid programs, including their international development volunteer (IDV) programs. The identification of capacity development as central to achieving aid effectiveness and ensuring the sustainability of development initiatives (Lusthaus, Adrien, & Perstinger, 1999, 1) was revitalised at the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. While there are various definitions of what constitutes capacity building, there is some consensus on common aspects. As an approach to development initiatives, capacity development is viewed not as an add-on component but as an integral part of how initiatives are conceptualised, designed, implemented and evaluated or “the way to do development” (Lusthaus, Adrien, & Perstinger, 1999, 9). Capacity development is also viewed as a process that enhances abilities of individuals, institutions and communities to “identify and meet development challenges in a sustainable manner” (Lavergne & Saxby, 2001, 4). The most commonly cited definition of capacity and capacity development comes from Morgan (1998) who sees capacity as “organisational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable countries, organisations, groups and individuals at any level of society to carry out functions and achieve their development objective over time” (Morgan, 1998, 2). In this definition, capacity development is conceptualised as strategies and methods used to enhance organisational performance (Morgan 1998). More recently, Researchers have highlighted the temporal and dynamic nature of this endeavour by pointing out that capacity is “the ability of a human system to perform, sustain itself and self-renew” (Ubels, Fowler, & Acquaye-Baddoo, 2010, 18). To achieve this capacity, organisations need to learn how “to act, generate development results, to relate, to adapt and to achieve coherence” (Ubels, Fowler & Acquaye-Baddoo, 2010, 10).

Thus, the basic elements of capacity development include a set of processes, actions and relationships that seek to improve the efficiency of an organisation and its effectiveness in achieving its goals, and thus to enhance its performance (Goldberg & Bryant, 2012, 531). To sustain, adapt and renew itself, an organisation also needs to be able to develop and maintain partnerships with the community it serves, as well as other stakeholders including governments, international funding bodies, and civil society organisations working in its field.

The ability to relate and to partner is an end of capacity development, but it is also a means. A cooperative relationship is a precondition to successfully transferring knowledge and skills. However, there has been criticism of the notion that capacities can be unilaterally transferred from North to South (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Wilson, 2006). When capacity development is instead conceived as a dialogical process, where both sides create new knowledge together by learning from each other, then it requires competences in collaboration, partnership formation and dialogue on both sides (Wilson, 2007).

Developing country perspectives on capacity development are rare in the development literature. To better understand how programs like AVID can promote capacity development, we need to explore the perspectives of host organisations. The interviews discussed in this report aim to provide qualitative data about HO perspectives on impacts of IDVs in developing organisational capacity.

### **Research aims**

The ARC Linkage Project “Cosmopolitan development: the impacts of international volunteering” sought to evaluate the impacts of international development volunteering on host organisations and volunteers. The project sought to contribute to research on the impacts of IDV in two ways:

1. By placing IDV within the conceptual framework of global development partnership, represented in the Millennium Development Goal 8 and the Sustainable Development Goal 17. This offered a new perspective on volunteerism as a relationship between volunteers and host organisations/communities.
2. By conceiving volunteers and their host organisations as cosmopolitans, rather than locals or nationals. This opened up new ways of exploring the impact of IDV on the participants’ orientation towards other cultures and their own place in the world.

### **Research method**

The empirical research presented here is based on a mixed-method approach involving a questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. While the survey provides a broad map of the motivations, reasons and expectations of HOs in the AVID program, the interviews elicit reflections on the role of volunteerism and its impacts, and on the HO participant’s own position and agency in the program.

We conducted semi-structured interviews with HO staff from Cambodia, Indonesia, Maldives, Peru and the Solomon Islands. These countries were chosen based on the size of the AVID programs in these locations. Indonesia, Cambodia and the Solomon Islands are among the largest recipients of volunteers while Peru and Maldives are significantly smaller. HOs were recruited to participate in the interviews with support from locally based Scope Global offices/partner organisations. Participation was voluntary and in the case of Cambodia, Indonesia and Peru, the interviews were conducted in the local language, if required, with the help of a local interpreter. The interviews were transcribed (and translated into English, where required) and entered into a qualitative data software program for analysis.

We also administered a HO Survey at the conclusion of 5 workshops conducted with HOs in Cambodia, Indonesia, Peru and Solomon Islands between August 2013 and March 2014 (N=47). The survey was provided in hard copy, either in English or translated into Khmer, Bahasa Indonesia or Spanish, and the completed surveys were entered into a quantitative software program for analysis. The survey took around thirty minutes

to complete, and featured a combination of question styles including multiple choice, ranking (from most to least important), Likert scale (to measure attitudes and behaviour), simple information giving (date and country of birth) and open-ended text-based questions. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee in June 2013 (Project Number 6044).

All data referenced in this report is available at:

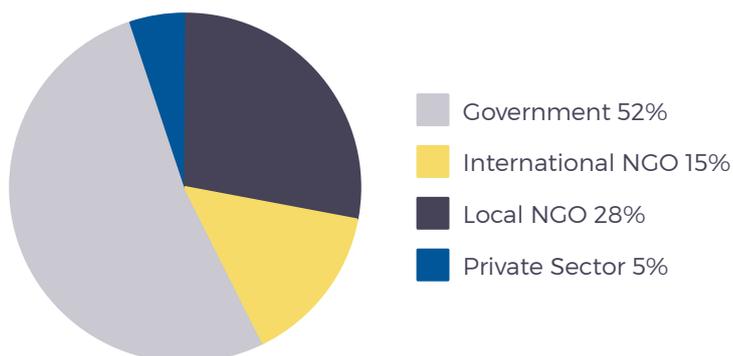
Survey: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5072/86/57C4D0206DE5C>

Interviews: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5072/86/57C4CF75D1824>

## Research participants

HOs who participated in the interviews represent a various stages of engagement with the AVID program – some organisations were currently hosting volunteers, others had recently hosted volunteers in the past, and a third group consisted of organisations that hoped to host volunteers in the future. Efforts were made to ensure representation from a range of organizational types – government agencies (28%), local non-government agencies (52%), international non-government agencies (15%) and the private sector (5%).

**Figure 1: Types of HOs interviewed**



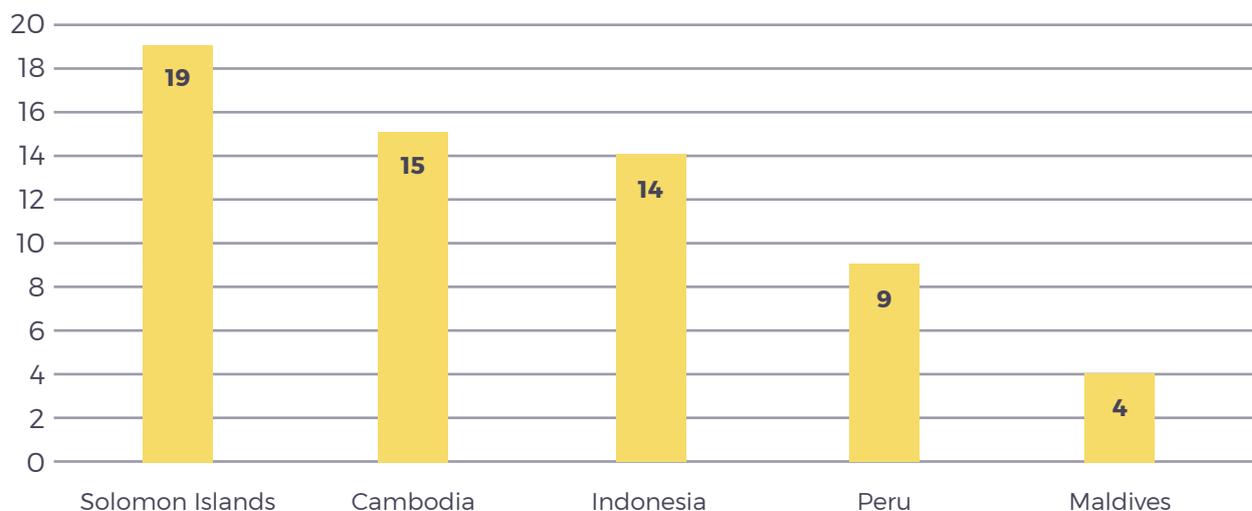
The distribution of HOs interviewed is similar to those surveyed in the Evaluation of the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) undertaken by Commonwealth Office of Development Effectiveness in January 2014. In this evaluation, multi-lateral organisations/peak bodies (such as UN agencies) are listed under the category titled 'Other'. We have included UN agencies as INGOs. Distinctive in our sample is the high proportion of local NGOs.

**Table 1: Comparison of ARC Linkage Grant and AVID evaluation sample**

	ARC Linkage Project	AVID Evaluation
Business/Private sector	5%	5%
Government	28%	29%
International NGO	15%	18%
Local NGO	52%	27%
Other	N/A	21%

In total 61 interviews were conducted with a fairly even spread across Cambodia, Indonesia and Solomon Islands (Figure 2). The fewer number of interviews from the Maldives and Peru reflects the smaller size of the volunteer program in these countries. In addition, in the case of Peru the volunteer program has been closed.

**Figure 2: Number of interviews conducted in each case study**



52% of the HOs were currently hosting/had hosted AYADs; 31% were currently hosting/had hosted AVIDs; and 16% had not hosted a volunteer or were unsure whether their volunteer was an AVID or an AYAD.

Our survey findings indicate that almost three-quarters of HOs also host volunteers from other countries. In the 47 responses, the most frequently mentioned countries are USA and Canada (14 HOs), European countries (9 HOs, some mentioning multiple EU countries). Eight HOs get volunteers from Asian countries including Korea, Japan, HK, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, and Burma (some of these might be UN volunteers); and one HO each mentioned receiving volunteers from Africa and Latin America.

### **Data collection and analysis**

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed to capture HOs perspective on the reasons for hosting volunteers; their role in the volunteering process; the kinds of relationships that are built; impacts from hosting volunteers; HOs broader views on development, volunteering, Australia and the world.

Based on the semi-structured interview, 26 high level codes were identified and applied to 382 pages of transcribed interviews. A coding manual was developed with coding categories, definitions, and examples of coded texts for each category (Weber, 1990). These codes were applied to transcribed interviews using Nvivo10 by a single coder. A second coder then verified the coding to ensure consistency. Differences in coding were discussed and resolved with additions made to the coding manual as and when required.

The most frequently coded items are detailed in table 2..

**Table 2: Codes used to analyse data**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Explanation for the codes</b>	<b>Number of interview pages generated</b>
Q1 Australian development volunteer program	Comments made about the Australian volunteer program and how it differs from other volunteer programs	65
Q2 Volunteering as a form of development	Role of volunteers in development/Uniqueness of volunteers	28
Q3 Role in volunteering	Role descriptions, role expectations, changing roles	39
Q7 Change in processes	Changes in the way organisations do things - eg. adopting new work practices, creating policy, approaching donors, organising websites & data	13
Q9 Change in skills	Changes in skills or capacity development (the ability to do things)	23
Q10 Change in attitudes	Changes that relate to people's attitudes, eg. becoming more humble, flexible, tolerant, patient, motivated, confident	5
Q11 Change in effectiveness	Changes that relate to the impact of the HO in the broader community - eg. extending its reach, improving its services	6
Q12 Change in knowledge/ understanding	Increased (or decreased) understanding/ knowledge of country specific local issues and culture, or understanding/knowledge of Australia or the West	37
Q13 Relationship between HO and volunteer	Comments on communication, cooperation, benefits, etc.	109
Q16 Relationship between HO and other organisations/civil society	Networking, profile of HO in the community, access to donors, etc.	6
Q18 Australia/ns in the world	Views on Australia in the world (e.g. relationship between Australia and the placement country, or how Australians are perceived in that country)	19
Q21 Reasons for volunteering	Responses to the question why the HO wanted a volunteer	24
Q22 Change in world view	Responses to the question whether/how the respondent's world view has changed as a result of hosting a volunteer	12
Q23 Managing, negotiating and resolving conflicts	Explicitly acknowledged tensions, conflicts, misunderstandings etc.	14

## REASONS FOR HOSTING VOLUNTEERS

The focus of this report is to understand the impact of IDVs on organisational capacity development from the perspectives of HOs. Hence we focus on the codes that relate to the reasons offered by HOs for participating in the volunteer program, their relationships with the volunteers (particularly benefits derived), and the impacts volunteers have on their organisations.

The HO survey asked respondents to rank nine reasons for hosting a volunteer from most important (rank 1) to least important. The results indicate that the primary reason for hosting volunteers is to “utilise their skills”, with 84% ranking this reason among the top four reasons (including 43% first). “Building the capacity of staff” is the next most significant reason (71% ranked it among the top four reasons, including 14% first). Third is to “provide opportunities for volunteers” to contribute, a more volunteer focused reason (64% ranked it among the top four reasons, including 10% first). The fourth most highly ranked reason is to expose the organisation to “new ideas and knowledge” (62% ranked it among the top four reasons, including 12% first), which is closely linked with the purpose of “exchanging ideas” (39% ranked this among the top four). This suggests that a broader definition of capacity development is at work here, whereby the organisation seeks to benefit from the volunteer’s skills, knowledge, ideas and other useful contributions.

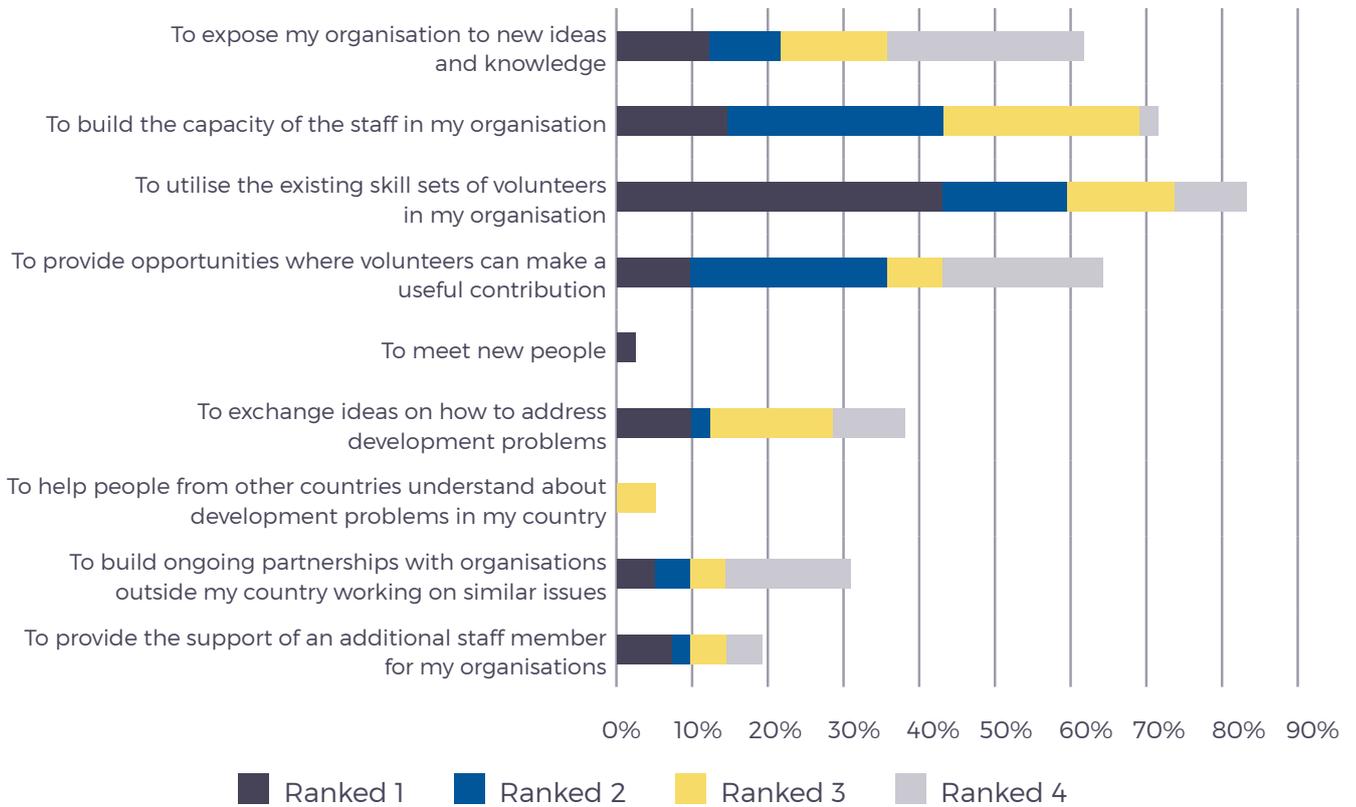
When we look at the reasons that HOs ranked 3 or 4, ideas and capacity building are the most important. We also start to see partnerships with other organisations (23%) as being important. Meeting new people and helping people to understand development problems (what we might describe as development education) are not among the highly ranked reasons.

Some respondents offered additional reasons for hosting volunteers, including to share experience to develop the organisation; to make connections for future fundraising; to provide opportunity for volunteers to enjoy living in a different context; and to use the volunteer’s motivation to boost development efforts.

Turning to the interviews, we found that these reinforced the survey findings. HOs identified three main reasons during interviews:

1. develop human resource capacity and organisational systems/policies
2. gain affordable access to expertise
3. create an international workplace

**Figure 3: Reasons for hosting an Australian volunteer (ranking by % of respondents)**



There are subtle differences in the reasons driving the need for volunteers depending on the type of organisation (local NGO, INGO or government agency). For government agencies and INGOs, the primary driver is developing human resource capacity. For local NGOs, the reasons for hosting volunteers appear evenly divided between the need to develop human resource capacity, access affordable expertise, and create an international workplace. These are discussed in more detail below.

## Developing human resource and organisational capacity

HOs see offering volunteer placements as a means to develop their organisation's human resource capacity. This suggests that the mandate of AVID scheme aligns with the needs of host organisations. From 'reinforcing our team'<sup>1</sup> to acting as role models, volunteers are seen as an important enabler of skill development within host organisations. As a result of this skill development, host organisations can become a local capacity building resource for other organisations. Thus a volunteer's contributions can lead to sustainable ongoing skill development even after the placement ceases.

**There's a focus on capacity building in the terms of reference ... and that was something that my office needed, somebody who would work primarily on building the capacities of national staff within the office. - Ari (INGO)**

**Volunteers have the knowledge, experience and qualifications that can help our organisation and develop our staff. So they help develop our human resource capacity which is important for the company in the future. - Fetu (Local NGO)**

**I think skilled volunteers ... come with a wealth of knowledge that isn't necessarily in Cambodia at this point in time, particularly in the field of social work... there is a great need in Cambodia to have people come over and help develop these skills within the country. - Gough (Local NGO)**

Acute human resources shortages in small island states like the Solomon Islands and Maldives mean that for some HOs the primary contribution of volunteers is 'filling in the gaps'<sup>2</sup> and providing both the labour force and the skills needed to carry out everyday tasks to keep the organisation going. These HOs also face the issue of skilled staff seeking better opportunities in other countries where specialised skills are in higher demand and rewards are greater. Therefore they are constantly in need for capacity development.

Other HOs feel the need to develop their human resource capacity because the organisation is growing or moving into new areas of work. Volunteers also contribute to human resource development by assisting organisations to better align their internal policies and organisational systems to keep pace with the changes in the organisation and with external demands and opportunities for development interventions that require specific skills.

<sup>1</sup> Alfredo (Government Agency)

<sup>2</sup> Akamu (Government Agency)

**My unit focuses on environmental law. This is a new area for us. We don't have experience in these areas. We need volunteer to assist in building our capacity. It's hard to find lawyers with experience in this area in Solomon Islands. So the volunteer helps fill the gap so that we can deliver our services. - Mere (Government Agency)**

**Engineering skills are in high demand. Solomon Island nationals who have engineering skills are always eyeing greener pastures. We are trying to change our staffing requirements so that we can make the best use of the skills available to us. So we need volunteers to train our staff, upgrade the skills of the field staff and increase their capacity to become barefoot engineers. So we want volunteers to train and build our staff capacity and mentor them in the field. - Moana (NGO)**

**We need to strengthen and improve our structure. But this is very new for us. We just get funds and implement projects. But sometimes we see we had conflict between policy and our real practice. We have to revise policy to fit with our organisation. - Yeong (Local NGO)**

These research findings confirm those of other studies. Lough and his collaborators (2010, 6), for example, identified four ways in which international volunteers increase organisational capacity: by relieving immediate labour shortages, providing tangible resources to help sustain the organisation, offering new ideas and increasing intercultural competence, as well as transferring professional and technical skills. While the latter is most closely related to capacity *building*, it is clear that the impacts of volunteerism are more appropriately described with the broader concept of capacity *development*. Other research has found that HOs are interested not only in the specialist skills that a volunteer may bring, “but also a range of attitudes and ideas that can be assimilated over time into the organization” (Impey and Overton, 2014, 123). Our interview material adds detail and depth by fleshing out the organisational and locational contexts in which HOs utilise volunteers.

### **Affordable access to expertise**

HOs perceive volunteers as providing affordable access to expertise at low cost to the organisation. This is attractive to cash-strapped government and non-government organisations in small countries where local staff is unavailable and where organisations cannot afford to hire external consultants. Even when expertise is available in the country, some organisations do not have the financial resources to appoint skilled staff, or are not able to find the right mix of skills. Some NGOs, particularly those located outside the capital cities, may find it difficult to attract staff at affordable rates, and tend to rely mainly on local volunteers (Perold et al, 2013).

**I wanted to develop our eLearning system but because of financial difficulties, we didn't have enough finance to hire a person...I talked to one my friends [in Australia] and I ask him for a quotation and if he can come here for a couple of weeks and do it. If I am not mistaken it was kind of fifty thousand dollars or something like that. We cannot afford that. So that's why I went for the volunteer option. - Jaffer (Government Agency)**

**Volunteers are very valuable to small NGOs who do not have the capacity to employ all the staff with the kinds of skills the organisation needs. So volunteers not only help build capacity, they act as staff as well. - Joses (NGO)**

**What we learned from our experience with three AYADs, we could basically ask them to do anything. They are willing to do everything, they can translate, they can teach us English, they help us cleaning, and they don't mind doing that. But they are not in depth in their field. They are good but they are not professional in doing their work. They are not trained in special needs education. - Belinda (Local NGO)**

Affordable access to expertise translates in some cases to volunteers being seen as an 'extra pair of hands' for small local NGOs, as pointed out in the previous section. This is particularly true in the case of young volunteers who are seen as dynamic and enthusiastic but lacking in specific skills the organisation might need. These volunteers are seen to be more suited to supporting a broad range of everyday tasks.

### **Creating an international workplace**

HOs see learning to work in a globalised world as becoming increasingly important. Dealing with international donors and the increasing number of expats and volunteers requires skills for working across cultures. An international workplace is one that is open to new ideas and ways of solving problems, and where staff are confident and able to communicate across linguistic, cultural, and often also professional boundaries. Australian volunteers' English language capabilities are an important contribution to fostering such a workplace environment.

The creation of an international workplace is closely linked with the intercultural learning and exchanges which are discussed in greater detail in the next section. This contribution to organisational capacity is also highlighted by Lough et al (2010) who point to the enhancement of "cultural competence" as a result of volunteer working alongside HO staff.

**Volunteers ...help us with learning how to work in a cross cultural environment. We are a media organisation so interacting with people from different cultures is important. By having an Australian volunteer we can learn how to interact. - Fetu (Government Agency)**

## RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN HOST ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR VOLUNTEERS

The overwhelming majority of HOs spoke positively about the relationship they share with their volunteers. They identified working as a team and collaborating as key characteristics of this relationship. There is a clear recognition among HOs that hosting volunteers results in mutual skill building and exchange of knowledge. This indicates that HO perceptions of the relationships with their volunteers are in-line with the notion of capacity development as a dialogical process, where both sides create new knowledge together by learning from each other. Hosting a volunteer provides opportunities for sharing ideas and intercultural learning on both sides, as discussed in more detail below.

### Exposure to new ideas/contexts

HOs believe that new information, perspectives and ideas that volunteers bring to placements act as benchmarks against which the organisation can measure its performance in addressing the local issues. As a fresh pair of eyes, volunteers can help the organisation look beyond its familiar context and widen its field of reference. They offer HOs alternative ways of doing things that might be more effective, if not now, then in the future.

This learning and exposure is not unidirectional. Volunteers are frequently exposed to issues and ways of working that they may not have encountered before. In a developing country context things work very differently from what they might be used to. Sometimes placements highlight common challenges and thus provide volunteers the opportunity to apply what they have learned upon their return. HOs see placements as opportunities for volunteers to apply their theoretical knowledge in a real world setting. This exposure enables volunteers to build an important skill set in the global workplace – such as learning about the context in which development takes place, how to deal with a variety of challenges, learning to adapt and being flexible. HOs are also aware that even though sometimes volunteers are seen as experts, they can still learn from the experiences of staff alongside whom they work.

**They can tell us some of our gaps and give us new ideas to fill those gaps. In Cambodia not many people go travelling for work so we don't know what is happening outside. So when we have volunteer they can tell us so we have broader information about what we are doing. It is an indicator for us to measure and check and also to monitor where we are now. - Yeong (Local NGO)**

**They share their knowledge about what they have experienced from where they have come from or what they have read. This helps us think about what we can do differently or how we can change and adapt things for our context. So in some way our eyes are opened to other new ideas. - Tina (INGO)**

**Counterpart benefits from the new ideas shared with them. Although it is not applicable for now because we are at this level compared to Melbourne, but at least we have an idea that is applicable in the future. - Phary (NGO)**

**I think the issue of capacity building sort of works both ways. I think it's very important to show that this [volunteer program] builds capacity for young Australians, giving them experience beyond their borders, preparing them for dealing with challenges. That's again the real meaning of a partnership, it's not an assistance program, it's a partnership program so both sides benefit. - Ari (International NGO)**

### **Intercultural Learning**

Building on this theme of reciprocal learning, HOs underscore the importance of intercultural competence, which Lough describes as "a skill that is learned and developed through experiential contact with new cultures" (Lough, 2010, 20). Intercultural learning is most effective through direct experience in real-life situations, and volunteerism provides this experience. Intercultural learning is a vital ingredient in building productive working relationships between HOs and volunteers. For the volunteer there is a lived experience of what it means to be privileged. According to HOs, working and living in their country makes volunteers more aware of the things that they take for granted. This resonates with Lough et al.'s (2010) findings. They report that some volunteers struggle with their encounters with extreme poverty and need to be supported by HO staff to develop a deeper understanding of these issues. By gaining an understanding of the other culture, volunteers develop a better understanding of themselves and their culture.

HOs recognize the diversity that having a volunteer brings to their organisations and its importance. HO staff learn how to interact with foreigners not only by working with them but also by sharing everyday experiences beyond the workplace, such as cooking, eating and chatting. These activities result in an increased confidence in working with people from other cultures. Depending on the nature of the placement, there is the potential for that diversity to extend into community as well. This is why many HOs feel that it is not just expertise they look for when selecting volunteers, but also their ability to work as a member of a team. Some HOs talk about the importance of preparing volunteers for the differences in culture they will encounter. They point out that there is also some work required in preparing HOs to receive volunteers who are from a different cultural background.

**They recognise their luck. Honiara is an expensive place to live. Because we have a good relationship they come and see how much we earn and how we survive. They are shocked at first. I think it makes them feel they need to give back in somewhat through volunteering. Volunteers I think learn to overcome the frustrations of working in a place that doesn't have everything. They learn to adjust and deal with the pressure of working a developing country where we need to get things done but may not have the skills and resources. We learn not only the skills the volunteer has to share according to the terms of reference but also other skills like writing reports, how to interact with foreigners. We learn English, they learn Pijin [local language] and they also learn about our cultural practices.**  
- *Commins (Private Sector)*

The type of assignment plays an important role in determining whether an ongoing relationship eventuates. Almost all HOs allude to ongoing informal non-task oriented contact with volunteers after the placement comes to an end. These are the result of personal friendships being developed during the placement. This has value in and of itself as volunteer can serve as ambassadors for the country/HO they were placed with. However, ongoing formal connections related to skill development or information exchange or networking are less common as they depend on how HOs and volunteers approach their assignments. A project-based approach tends to result in the formal relationship terminating when the project ends, even though informal connections may continue. The commitment is to the project and task completion rather than to the HO. When placements focus on building and expanding organizational structures and processes, HOs feels there is a greater sense of ownership which results in ongoing connections with volunteers post-placement. HOs also emphasise the need to have this conversation with volunteers about post-placement connections in order to help sustain the relationship.

**I think our past volunteer feels a sense of ownership because she helped establish the research unit so she wants to help us sustain it in the long run. We had a meeting at the end of her assignment to plan the next steps and to see if it's possible for her to come back and check on how the plan is progressing. This will be very beneficial for an ongoing relationship. I think in fact having a follow up visits as part of the volunteer program will be good. We don't know if this is possible. We have asked [the in-country volunteer management team] but we have not heard back from them.**

**- Fetuao (Government Agency)**

## Differentiating volunteering from other development assistance relationships

The opportunity volunteering presents for intercultural capacity building, mutual skill development and knowledge exchange differentiates it from other forms of development assistance. We sought to tease this out through our questions on the unique contributions of volunteers as compared to other forms of development assistance, such as technical consultants, who also undertake capacity development.

For HOs in middle income countries like Peru and Indonesia, volunteers facilitate the shift from assistance to partnership. Volunteers are seen as part of the HO's team, comparable to a local staff member in many instances. Their work with counterparts and/or staff teams is expressed as an organic, bottom-up way of working as opposed to the top-down, more authoritarian manner of many consultants. In countries that no longer see themselves as "poor" but middle income, consultants are seen as a remnant of the old colonial aid model while volunteering with its emphasis on partnership is seen as the new model.

HOs in lower income countries see volunteers as more like themselves in terms of income, living conditions and so forth. Volunteers usually work and interact with HO staff on an everyday basis while consultants tend to interact more with management. Another source for the greater distance between HO staff and consultants is the generous remuneration paid to consultants and the perks that come with being an expat, of which the HOs are keenly aware. While some volunteers also share in some of these privileges, many do not. HOs also express that there are differences in motivations, with consultants being motivated by money and volunteers by passion and wanting to give back. Other research has also found that HO staff feel more equal to volunteers (McWha 2011), and volunteers feel that their lower remuneration helped them build better relationships with staff in their host organisations (Watts 2002). As Devereux (2008) points out, more equal relationships create an environment that promotes and encourages mutual learning without which capacity development is difficult to accomplish.

The perceived equality between volunteers and HO staff means that HOs feel more empowered to mould and direct a placement to suit their needs. In contrast, the perceived power imbalance in relation to consultants results in HOs having less control over decisions regarding what they do or do not need. Most HOs also strongly emphasise that the time they have to build a relationship with a volunteer is a key point of distinction compared to interactions with technical consultants. Longer time spent in country, being embedded with the community, and being perceived as an equal all contribute to volunteers being easier to relate to. If development is about building partnerships, then it appears from an HO's perspective that volunteers well positioned to build these partnerships with HOs.

**This is the story of middle income countries across the world...they don't even want to hear about assistance. It's like no we don't need assistance, you want to partner with us - fine let's do it. We are interested in showcasing our capacity, what we can do, we want to become contributors, we don't want to just be on the receiving end of things. I think this is part of the mental shift that needs to take place, that's why this particular form of volunteers works well for me and works well within this particular political context. - Aron (Local NGO)**

**Consultants have much better working conditions – they are provided with vehicles, good accommodation and high income. Volunteers live among the local people so they understand better the everyday challenge. Volunteers are down to our level, we know they get paid more but it's almost the same as our level, only a little more. - Commins (Private Sector)**

**It can be very motivating for teams to have a volunteer come in with a fresh pair of eyes who will stay rather than a consultant come in for a short period of time. They don't understand the context. What we find valuable is we like to start relationships. I think interpersonal relationship and relationship building are important. The cultural exchanges as well is quite important. - Rita (Local NGO)**

### **Mutual leveraging of benefits**

One possible indicator of a growing partnership is that both parties are able to gain benefits from it. Several HOs indicate that volunteers use their placements in developing countries to improve their credentials in terms of working overseas and are able to leverage this experience in gaining better employment. INGOs in particular see themselves as providing learning opportunities for volunteers to build, extend or change their careers. At the same time, HOs articulate how they use volunteers strategically to push their own agendas.

**...a lot of volunteers invest their time [during their placement] in order to do a career change and end up getting themselves into the kind of networks and with the right experience to continue a more kind of paid employment and I know this is a common theme. - Steven (NGO)**

**We've got one volunteer who was a principal back in Australia in a very small school and here in the Maldives we have a lot of small schools and we are trying to implement multi-ed teaching. We have been trying to do this for a number of years, still make no progress. So what we are now planning to do is we are going to use [the volunteers] to sell the idea that this works in Australia so it should work in the Maldives as well. So if it works in developed countries it should come to our country as well. It is not something for the disadvantaged. - Sorel (Government Agency)**

HOs are very aware that having volunteers gives them credibility. Volunteers are seen as increasing the HO's visibility in the sector in which they work. Some use volunteers to improve their networks with other organisations. Close ties between volunteers in different organisations, their existing networks in Australia, links with in-country posts and a level of confidence in reaching out to other organisations, especially donor agencies and INGOs, can be leveraged by HOs to better connect with local and international stakeholders. However, not all HOs feel it is appropriate for volunteers to represent the organisation. International NGOs (World Vision, UN etc.), in particular, see their role as building the capacity of the volunteers by providing a learning space for them. Hence they see greater value in the volunteers playing a supportive role rather than assuming responsibility for being the face of the organisation. According to Lough et al. (2010, 6), this is one aspect of social capital that helps sustain the organisation.

**We know our weakness. We are very bad on PR. Being a 100% local NGO building the trust takes a long time. If you have a foreigner in the organisation it's much easier to access funding, if you are 100% Indonesian it is quite hard. We have been around for 17 years. I can see that a foreign NGO starts an office here and they gain trust from the donors very quickly.... Like it or not, some of them [volunteers] are connected with our donor, they talk to our donor. They will give validation for our work. This is one of the biggest benefits we have, apart from the work they do here. - Wayang (Local NGO)**

**Our visibility as an organisation increases as well. The volunteers have their own contacts in Australia as well as here in Solomon Islands so when we have events and things like that they help us advertise and this increases our visibility as an organisation and connects us with others. This connection sometimes it's with donors who we are interested in developing into our partners. - Lelei (NGO)**

**Having this volunteer helped us build connections with other organisations. For example at the end of this volunteers assignment, our research officer will go as an attachment to the Tasmanian government to observe how they do and use research - this is proposed and I am fairly sure it will happen. - Fetuao (Government Agency)**

**I mean in the current state of relations within Australia and Indonesia I don't necessarily want the young Australian volunteer to be the centre in my outreach and communications, to be a public figure in that sense. So it works for me to have somebody who is working and supporting behind the scenes a little more. That's more effective. - Ari (INGO)**

## Challenges faced in building relationships

Despite the positive reflections on their relationships with volunteers, HOs highlight a number of factors that can hinder relationship development. These are discussed below.

Treating volunteers as a member of staff comes with its own tensions that stem from the difference between a volunteer and an employee. Some of this tension stems from reporting relationships. There is a perception that the volunteer's accountability lies outside the HO and primarily with the international volunteer coordinating organisation (IVCO). Dissatisfaction with placements or other challenges are mediated through the in-country IVCO team, indicating that volunteers are more accountable to them than to HOs. Volunteers are required to send their end-of-assignment reports to the IVCO, rather than directing them to the HO. This makes it challenging for the HOs who are sometimes unclear about the extent to which they can be directive and exert their authority over a placement. This problem has been identified in other research which argues for the local control and management of volunteers through the host organisation's internal operations and reporting mechanisms (Impey & Overton 2014, 124).

**We are a small organisation and usually we don't have a specific job description. We all do everything. So when I ask 'Can you help us with our website' and he [volunteer] says 'Hm it's not my job', that's the difficulty. It is different from another employee. He is a volunteer so how could I push him to do that if he doesn't want to. With the employee you could push them and say 'You need to do this' as a manager I can. But with the volunteer I have to say like 'I am not sure, what do you think'?**

**- Imogen (NGO)**

A volunteer's orientation, interest in the placement and personality also have an impact on the extent to which relationships are built and sustained. Sometimes there are competing interests for the volunteer. They may have been chosen for a placement based on their particular skills but their interests lie elsewhere. If these other interests cannot be linked in some way to the placement then this can be hard to negotiate for the HO. Most HOs emphasise that volunteers need to be open to learning and willing to collaborate and adapt. Problems arise when volunteers see themselves as more skilled and knowledgeable than the HOs they are placed with.

**I don't know whether this has anything to do with it [volunteer feeling frustrated with the delays] but she definitely had other interests. She was interested for example researching natural healers in Peru and that was her own project. So there were other interests that didn't fit. - Aron (NGO)**

**[If] they display an attitude as such ‘I am here to help you, you don’t know what I know’ then it won’t work. What has worked is collaboration and partnership – ‘we work together on this so what do you have in place, what can we expand on. I think this has worked. What has not worked is ‘Oh I am superior to you, I am here to help you put in place what I know.’ This will not work, we are just too proud a group of people. - Laila (Government Agency)**

Compounding the sense of holding superior skills and knowledge is a lack of understanding among volunteers of what capacity development means and how it is done. Many see capacity development as training or teaching, and consequently find it difficult and challenging to integrate into the HO’s working practices. Language and cultural barriers also make capacity development challenging work. The inability to speak the local language poses significant communication problems which can result in the volunteers feeling frustrated that they are making little or no progress, and the HOs struggling to make their needs understood. This is also reported in other research on volunteers and capacity development (Sherraden, Lough & McBride, 2008).

**The idea is to come here and they have the objective to share their knowledge. But in the daily work environment, you don’t have too much time to share, you need to share in action, you need to share in work, not as a class, not as a teacher. So I think that is the reason why [the volunteer] didn’t fit well; why, because her idea was to explain to us, teaching is not necessarily sharing in a team. - Lorena (INGO)**

**Our requirement for volunteer is that that person has to be able to speak Bahasa. [The volunteer] was so excited about the post, she said she will learn Bahasa and I naively thought Ok she is learning she will be able to speak it. We send her to Kupang and then she got frustrated because she couldn’t cope with Bahasa. In Kupang there are not enough interpreters to support her. And we could not provide an extra interpreter for her for day to day work. So it was a frustrating experience for her. - Leanne (NGO)**

Cultural barriers can be equally difficult to negotiate. Some contextual understanding can be facilitated during pre-departure briefing, however volunteers need to develop cultural sensitivity. This partly comes from being observant and open to experiencing difference but also from a deep understanding of their own culture. Volunteers can fall short when it comes to the latter, as very little prior orientation is provided in unpacking dominant culture.

**The concept of ‘face’ [for Cambodians] means that if I have to admit to failure or not knowing something, it is seen as shameful. So in a relationship of knowledge exchange it is difficult because there is a lot of frustration for the volunteer when there is no clear ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ So they have to learn that there are ways of phrasing questions and finding out where it allows somebody to maintain their dignity. I find that sometimes volunteers can be very confrontational and this is damaging to the relationship. - Rita (NGO)**

### **What makes a placement successful?**

HOs offer several pointers to making a placement successful. The first is related to recruiting volunteers who best fit the needs of the organisation, not just in terms of the skills required by the HO but also in terms of attitude. Flexibility, ability to partner and work collaboratively and being open to learning are highly valued by HOs.

Second, placements need to be designed in ways that encourage flexibility and need to be realistic what outcomes are likely to be achieved. HOs find very specific terms of reference challenging because it limits the scope for negotiation. This is particularly an issue if there is a gap of almost a year between recruitment and deployment. In this time HO needs could have changed. Those volunteers who are open and willing to negotiate these changes find themselves making greater contributions to their HOs than those who are less flexible and see the terms of reference as ‘written in stone’. In turn, HOs believe that they also need to be open and flexible to best leverage the skills that volunteers bring with them. They admit that it is unlikely that the volunteers will have all the skills they require and it is therefore more beneficial to adapt and change the placements to suit the skill set of the volunteer. Volunteer placements work best when HOs identify the capacity gaps at an organisational level that need to be developed rather than a narrow skill level. This allows for greater flexibility in what the volunteer does during their placement and improves their alignment with the needs of the HO.

The design of the volunteer program should embed mutual learning as a core component of the placement and need to be realistic. They need to take into account that the first three months are spent by the volunteer just understanding the context, becoming comfortable with the new working environment, reaching out and building relationships with the staff and counterparts. The next three are spent planning and working out what can be done (this has often changed given the lapse of at least a year since recruitment) which leaves about 6 months for implementation. The manner in which the volunteer placements are currently structured assumes that the work begins from the day the placement begins. This puts considerable stress on both volunteers and HOs. There is not enough recognition that volunteers have little knowledge of the HO’s work prior to arriving for the placement. Having this prior knowledge can facilitate building relationships. This is easier to do in the case of INGOs where information can more easily be found online. In the case of smaller local NGOs this can be challenging as websites can be outdated or not available in English. Encouraging contact between HOs and volunteers prior to arrival is one way to address this issue.

In addition, HOs feel that IDV programs underestimate the importance of language skills. Language requirements need to be built into placements as far as possible. HOs feel that efforts need to be made to provide language training prior to placement with additional resources available while in country to improve fluency.

Finally, HOs believe that there is a need for a whole-of-organisation approach to hosting and managing the volunteer. Decisions to host a volunteer are made at senior levels and not necessarily communicated through to the rest of the organisation. This can pose significant challenges for those who are selected as counterparts who feel that working with a volunteer places an additional burden on them. There were mixed responses to the counterpart model. For some HOs this worked well, for others counterparts felt forced into the program, often because of their English language skills. Some HOs pointed out that developing the capacity of one person in the organisation posed a significant challenge for on-going human resource capacity as upskilled counterparts often left in search of better opportunities. Such HOs expressed a preference for volunteers to work with a team so that the newly developed or improved capacities stayed within the organisation.

Linked to the above is the importance of having clear internal structures within the HOs to manage volunteers in ways that foster accountability to the organisation and not just to the volunteer program management. Clear internal reporting structures also assist HOs and volunteers to work and negotiate placements that have beneficial outcomes for both parties and provide a clear system to address any grievances or challenges that might arise. This is not just about assigning a supervisor for a volunteer but a mechanism that builds into the placement regular meetings, reports on progress, plans of action and so forth. The current system of three, six and end of assignment reporting is seen by HOs as volunteer's accountability to the program rather than to the HO. This suggests that volunteer program management need to develop capacity within HOs to manage, monitor and evaluate their volunteers.

**Scope Global, when they are sending, I think they need to look at probably flexibility, how well they can partner with people and those kinds of traits are as important as skills match, you know if they look at it holistically I think it will be okay. - Laila (Government Agency)**

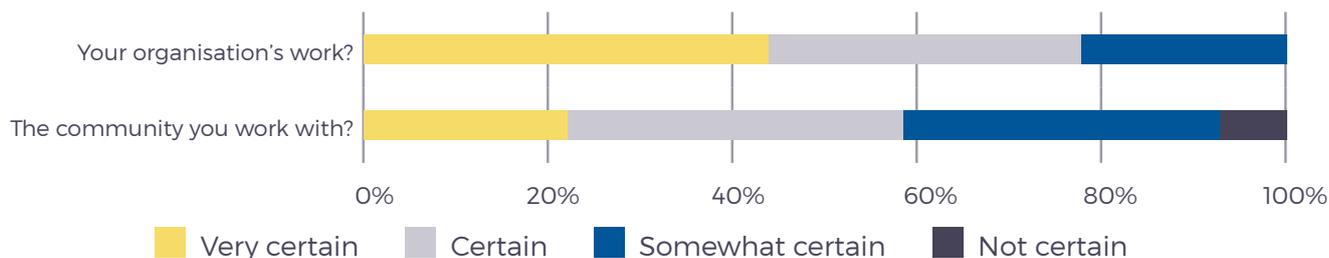
**I believe very strongly in working to people's strengths. We are small enough that we don't have to try and fit a round peg in a square hole. If I get someone with strong IT skills then I will put them to work in that area. - Ari (INGO)**

**If the supervisor is not tuned into making it a good learning experience then it's going to end up being just okay. Supervisors need to know that it [volunteers] doesn't come in for free. I mean you have to invest time instead of paying them a salary you invest time. They have to learn and be more useful and more productive and then to learn how things work. - Aron (Local NGO)**

## IMPACTS OF HOSTING VOLUNTEERS

Thus far we have discussed the reasons behind HO's participation in IDV programs, the kinds of relationships that develop between HO's and IDV's and challenges faced by HO's in the relationship building process. We now turn to the impacts volunteers have on HO's, both in terms of contributions to capacity development and fostering the cosmopolitan orientations of the HO's.

**Figure 4: Level of confidence about positive impact of volunteer**



The survey data suggests that almost 80% of the HO are certain or very certain that the impact on their organisation is positive; the rest is somewhat certain. Just under 60% are also certain of a positive impact on the community the organisation works with, and only 7% are not certain of this.

### Supporting organisational activities

According to HO's, volunteers make significant contributions to their work. For instance, host organisations in Peru discussed the work the volunteers did in developing international guidelines for NGOs' engagement with mining companies, and designing monitoring and evaluation systems. In the Solomon Islands, HO's highlighted the work associated with establishing IT infrastructure and improvements to water & sewerage management systems. Examples from the Maldives include volunteers supporting the development of e-learning, and in Cambodia they were contributing to the NGO's shadow report on CEDAW. Skill development range from broad areas like using the media and ICTs grant writing and strategic planning, to very technical areas like water and sewerage management, quality control, speech pathology and counselling. This list is by no means exhaustive but indicates the range of inputs provided by volunteers. By taking on specific tasks and working as part of a team, volunteers expand the team's capacity to complete existing work and/or take on new work. In addition to skill building, volunteers also support host organizations in their everyday work. This is particularly important for local NGOs who have a small staff. Most host organizations expect volunteers to play a dual role – build capacity and “do the job”<sup>3</sup>:

**...the work that she did in terms of setting up this new diligence system...we developed international guidelines for working with mining companies...the tool, we're now applying that thing, we're going to use it widely, with a few modifications. - Aron (Local NGO)**

<sup>3</sup> Akamu (Government Agency)

**We benefit because we are able to finish our work and complete our projects which would be difficult without the volunteer's help as we have a very small staff. - Lagi (Government Agency)**

**The idea is that the volunteer is here to share his knowledge. But in the day to day work, we need hands to work, so he also has very specific responsibilities coordinated by me. - Lorena (INGO)**

**We have a good skills base. I think in this situation, [the volunteer] is above all to integrate and take on some tasks as part of the team. In this case we did not look for such specialized skills that would require the volunteer to teach us. His profile is aligned with the work our team already does. - Alfredo (Government Agency)**

### **Building the organisation's profile and networking**

Volunteers contribute to building the HO's profile through improving marketing materials such as developing and redesigning websites. Part of profile building is writing grant applications for future funding, as this is one mechanism for the organization to become more visible to potential donors. Many HOs explain that volunteers seem to better understand what donors want and are able to provide invaluable inputs to grant applications to make them more competitive:

**The volunteer is working as the communication development officer so he actually produced a video commercial to promote my organisation and the work we do in Indonesia ...previously we have no one to do that and we don't know how to make it...he is actually teaching one of my staff to do it in the future so when he is gone we can do it ourselves - Thea (INGO)**

**...we don't have skill to present our profile. So the volunteer help us to set up a blog, website where we can share information to the world about what we are doing and the work of the community as well. - Arunny (NGO)**

## Changes to organisational norms and work practices

Volunteers make changes to organisational norms and work practices. Given their location in the host organisations, volunteers have extensive opportunities to interact with an organisation's staff. Through the course of their interactions and sometimes through targeted activities, they assist in the creation of cohesive teams that enable the organisation to achieve its goals. Another example of volunteers contributing to improving organisational processes is the establishment of an effective information sharing mechanism in the HO.

By serving as role models, volunteers also influence work practices. In the Solomon Islands, for example, where the notion of timeliness (i.e. coming on time for meeting, time pressure etc) is more relaxed and flexible, volunteers would turn up at 9am every day. This meant that HO staff who had the keys to the office were forced to turn up at that time as well. When asked whether this created tensions or resentment, the response was that working in an international work environment, especially with international donors, it is necessary for Islanders to adapt their work patterns. Volunteers thus contribute to the spreading global work cultures and to bringing local organisations more in line with dominant western ways of working.

In addition to changing work practices, volunteers can also influence organisational values. Drawing on their understanding and experience of work and life back home, volunteers can impact on the ways organisations understand and implement core policies, like equal opportunity. Sometimes a volunteer's limited understanding of critical development concepts such as equality, equity and equal opportunity can be problematic. For example, in the Solomon Islands one HO recalled how their understanding of fairness changed as a result of their volunteer's contribution to their work. The HO was eligible for government scholarships for teachers to help them improve their skills and wanted to give this scholarship to one of their senior female teachers to advance her career and become a principal (since there are so few female principals in the Islands). However, the HO said that the volunteer's emphasis on merit made them change their mind and select a male candidate instead.

**The volunteer participated in the development of a good team spirit in the department where he worked. The volunteer put together a swimming team that is now considered by the staff as an important space for team building as it allows the development of more social links outside the work between various staff members. - (End of Assignment report from a HO based in Asia)**

**I think the main contribution has been on improving some work practices, so bringing some of the innovations from the Canberra office. For example, when we're working on things collaboratively, rather than sending around word documents, we're now using Google Docs, it makes things faster and easier, we've got a calendar we all share now. It's mostly useful in terms of me putting things out to the rest of the staff so they'll always know what my schedule is, and so they know what we're working towards and we know what the big events are that we're working towards. - Ari (INGO)**

## Change in world views

Creating an international workplace was cited as a motivation for hosting volunteers. This raises the question what impact hosting volunteers has on cosmopolitan orientations of host organisation staff. Two themes emerged regarding such impacts.

First, HOs point out that the exposure to new ideas and different ways of thinking and 'doing' that results from hosting volunteers opens up a world of possibilities. This can result in knowledge expansion that in turn can be leveraged by the organisation to improve, refine and enhance solutions to development issues faced by the communities they work with. HOs say that expanding their world view contributes to a sense of being connected to a global community. There is an increased recognition of the inter-connectedness with other parts of the globe and that the problems faced by host countries are not very different from those experienced elsewhere.

Second, the sense of being connected to a global community translates to a sense of a shared humanity. The insight that development problems are similar and inter-connected leads to the need for collective action to address them. There is a sense of hope that IDV programs can build bridges through mutual exchange of skills and knowledge and that through partnerships, seemingly intractable development problems can be addressed.

**We used to be like a frog in the well...our watching [perspective] is not wide, our thinking is not broad. When we have a relationship with the international volunteer, we get more idea; our thinking is more broad and we are not stuck in a small well. When we open our relationship then we can extend our knowledge. This is why we think it is very important to have volunteers.**

**- Yeong (Local NGO)**

**We are all from different countries and backgrounds and our challenges are different but it makes us realise that the internal affairs of one country are also the concern of other countries in the world. - Francis (Local NGO)**

**It helps us realise that the world is becoming a global village and we can all work together to bring about change. We can work anywhere at any time.**

**- Fetuao (Government Agency)**

**We have too many conflicts and working with volunteers tells us that there can be another way we can tap into the skills people have, share ideas and experiences to eradicate the world's problems. - Losefa (INGO)**

## People to people links

Changes in how HO see the world around them and their place in the world is premised on the interactions they have with volunteers. While developing people to people links are often mentioned in government documents as being an important component of the volunteer program (Office for Development Effectiveness 2014), very little evidence is provided as to what this actually means, and what the impacts are perceived to be. Our analysis highlights three themes.

First, the IDV program enables a better understanding of Australia and Australians. Particularly for countries less exposed to Australia, having a volunteer embedded with the community opens up possibilities to talk about Australia, and in doing so makes this far away land seem a lot closer. This results in an increased awareness of Australia, its people and culture. In other countries, having an Australian volunteer can help dispel stereotypes about Australia, and Western countries more generally, and provide an alternative view. This is similar to finding by Lough et al. (2010) who report that HO staff perception of Americans underwent a significant change as a result of interactions with American volunteers.

Second, the program serves as a tool for soft diplomacy, as volunteers disseminate ideas about Australian values, develop a shared understanding of issues, emphasise a shared history and promote cultural understanding.

Finally, the volunteer program helps build Australia's profile as a global citizen and a good neighbour. In countries where Australia's relations have been problematic, volunteers offer a means to balance negative perceptions that Australian government interventions may have created. This is the case for the Solomon Islands where the volunteer has become the human face of development assistance alongside the police-led RAMSI intervention.

**I think for a lot of people know where to place Australia on the map, its usually the big blob of land down there in the southern hemisphere, far away. But I think they [volunteers] brought it to life. - Aron (Local NGO)**

**I think it's an interesting time in Australia with the current government and what they want to do. Australia has a much more business minded government. The volunteer program is very cost effective. It provides Australia soft diplomatic power and increases the knowledge of Australians because Australia is an island nation and we don't understand the rest of the world very well. - Gareth (INGO)**

**I have read in the news some are very critical of RAMSI. There is some truth in what they say. But from working with the volunteers I think Australia is interested in he needs of developing countries. It's not just about giving money but building capacity which us much more important. - Losefa (INGO)**

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Our review of the literature on HO perspectives on the impact of volunteering suggests that there is a significant gap in our understanding which has only recently been addressed (Hawkins, Verstege, & Flood, 2013, Powell, Bratovic & Brussels, 2006, Impey & Overton, 2014, Perold et al, 2013, Lough & Matthew, 2013). As Lough et al. (2010, 1) point out, “we know relatively little about their actual effects on host communities and organizations - particularly from the perspectives of host-organization staff”. Our research addresses this gap.

We find that HOs are overwhelmingly positive in their assessment of the impact that volunteers have had on their organisation’s motivation, capacities and performance. At the same time, HOs have highlighted the reciprocity of capacity development, pointing to the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained by volunteers and themselves.

While most HOs tend to use the term ‘capacity building’ in their discussions of benefits accruing from such initiatives, it is more correct to use the term ‘capacity development’. According to the OECD, the use of the word “building” suggests that we are “starting with a plain surface and involving the step-by-step erection of a new structure, based on a preconceived design. Experience suggests that capacity is not successfully enhanced in this way” (OECD, 2006, 13). Capacity building alludes to a deficit model – there is a lack of capacity which therefore needs to be constructed. Capacity development, on the other hand, is “understood as the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time” (OECD, 2006, 13). The Australian government “defines capacity development as the process of developing competencies and capabilities in individuals, groups, organisations, sectors or countries that will lead to sustained and self-generating performance improvement” (Office for Development Effectiveness, 2014, 42).

In the light of HO perspectives reported here, capacity development appears to be the more appropriate terms to use. HO organisations have clearly articulated the contributions volunteers make to skill and personal development of their staff, highlighting the deep contextual and transcultural learning that takes place. As well, volunteers have the opportunity to develop vital technical and soft skills which improves their job prospects upon their return home. Our analysis suggests that hosting volunteers enables both volunteers and host organisations to develop, enhance and hone their capacity for:

- Knowledge acquisition – collecting, critically analysing, using skills and knowledge in framing ideas/ issues/problems and exploring solutions which can potentially enhance the impact of development programs
- Collaboration and networking within and beyond national boundaries – working in a global environment

This reciprocity of learning is an important feature of capacity development that is rarely captured. Where this reciprocity does not exist, ongoing relationships are harder to build. A purely technical relationship focusing on skills transfer and task completion alone is seen as less beneficial to both the HO and the volunteer. The HOs’ accounts of the range of capacities that are built indicate a need to expand our understanding of capacity development from a narrow focus on unilateral skills and knowledge transfer.

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