

ME WHAKAPUTA KĒ I RUNGA I TE TIKA

# JUST CHANGE

CRITICAL THINKING ON GLOBAL ISSUES  
He whakaaro kaikini mō ngā take o te ao

# GOOD INTENTIONS

*The Ethics of Volunteering*

## HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES – DO VOLUNTEERS HELP OR HINDER?

Volunteers who want to lend a hand may harm the very people they are there to help, themselves or other practitioners.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KUMI NAIDOO

The CEO of CIVICUS takes a global view on the problems and potential for volunteering.



# JUST CHANGE

*Just Change* is produced by Dev-Zone ([www.dev-zone.org](http://www.dev-zone.org)), a programme of the Development Resource Centre (DRC) – a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation governed by a charitable trust. We are core funded by NZAID Nga Hoe Tuputupu-mai-tawhiti (The New Zealand Agency for International Development).

The DRC's two programmes are Dev-Zone ([www.dev-zone.org](http://www.dev-zone.org)), a resource centre on international development and global issues for the development and human rights sector, as well as tertiary students and the general public, and the Global Education Centre ([www.globaled.org.nz](http://www.globaled.org.nz)), which provides training and resources on global education to the formal and informal education sectors, and the community youth sector.

The motivation for *Just Change* falls under Dev-Zone's mandate to inform and educate to empower people to take action to create a just world. Grounded in Aotearoa New Zealand and the Pacific, but with a global reach, *Just Change* prioritises an holistic, sustainable, approach to development; a call for the development community and the general public to take action; and an overall aim of ensuring that the voices – and the issues – of those who are most vulnerable are heard.

*Just Change* is a product of, by, and for, those who are invested in sustainable development, social justice, and human rights. The magazine is published every four months – each issue is based on a different global concern. Writers are not journalists; they are either those working in development or students/teachers of development studies and related programmes. Articles and other contributions are based on academic research and/or development work in the field.

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## HE WHAKAARO NĀ TE ĒTITA EDITORIAL

ALICE BEBAN AND ELENA WRELTON

Look into many magazines and you will come across stereotypes of the development volunteer – a young blonde woman holding an African baby; a tired doctor in a bombed hospital tent. Closer to home we may think of the suburban housewife helping with meals on wheels. However, these stereotypes do not adequately reflect the diverse contributions volunteers make to social justice and development.

Volunteers are the backbone of many development organisations—in Aotearoa New Zealand, more than 90% of non-profits rely entirely on volunteers to function—but often volunteering is assumed to be intrinsically good without questioning how it impacts on recipient communities and how it can be made more effective. Wider understanding of what constitutes volunteering and the huge growth in fee-paying volunteers and 'volunteer for credit' schemes raise important questions around how to ensure volunteers are properly valued and also that they 'do no harm'. In this issue of *Just Change*, we look critically at the changing nature of what constitutes volunteering and seek to re-focus attention on the quality of volunteering and its potential impacts.

Volunteering has been called a 'loose and baggy monster' for the distinct lack of agreement on what the term means. A number of authors in this issue shake up our stereotypes by questioning what the concept of 'volunteer' means to different cultures—it turns out that the 'typical' volunteer group contributing the most volunteer hours in Aotearoa New Zealand is Māori women. Motivations for volunteering may be changing too; authors in this issue ask what really motivates people to volunteer, and whether it matters if people are motivated to 'do good' or perhaps by more selfish reasons.

The nature of volunteering is changing. Research suggests that volunteers are less keen to commit to long periods of volunteering and instead are opting for shorter stints of volunteer work, or on-going internet-based contributions. This will have an impact on the role they are able to play in the development sector. Contributions in this issue on 'virtual volunteering' and 'corporate volunteering' ask how these changes will impact on development goals.

One important change is the boom in 'voluntourism', the fast-growing blend of development volunteering and vacation. In a climate where voluntourism operators such as i-to-i are bought by major package tour operators like First Choice, the line between voluntary and profit is becoming increasingly blurred. This presents new ethical dilemmas on top of questions around the direct impact of volunteers in overseas placements. We increasingly have to

question the motives and operations of the volunteer sending agencies as well as those of the volunteer. A number of articles deal with the issues around voluntourism, questioning both its impacts and suggesting ways potential benefits can be maximised; several sides of the debate are presented.

A further important issue for debate is whether diversity—one of the key aspirations of the development community—is fairly represented amongst development volunteers. With the increasing amount of fee-paying volunteers and an expectation in many areas of the development industry that volunteer internships may be a necessary precursor to employment, are volunteer opportunities (at least in formal development contexts) the domain of the wealthy? Does the popularity of programmes that offer university credits or benefit payments for volunteering compromise the concept of volunteering as a service performed by 'free will'?

These debates are essential for questioning the assumptions we hold, but we must also ask how the development community can move from debate towards solutions to ensure that the impacts of volunteering are positive and effective. Some suggest that the future of successful voluntourism depends on older, skilled volunteers, but what about the millions of people of all ages and abilities who want to contribute to a better world by offering their time and skills? With criticism of younger volunteers coming from the UK's VSO and the introduction of a new programme—'UniVol'—to include this same group by Aotearoa New Zealand's VSA, we can see that the debate is still very much in progress. Is there an answer in closer volunteer training and management, and more accountability for volunteer sending organisations—to both their volunteers and the community partners they work with? Contributions from VSA and Borderlands Cooperative provide new models for understanding volunteering and other authors suggest ways for people of all ages and backgrounds to leave a positive impact.

This issue of *Just Change* contributes to the vital debates on how volunteering, in all its guises and contexts, can work positively for social justice on a global scale. The development community needs to work to make sure that volunteering is valued, not simply due to an assumption that it is good, but for the real differences volunteers can make to the world.

*Alice Beban and Elena Wrelton are the two new editors of Just Change.*

*Coming Up:*

In commemoration of the upcoming 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, our next issue of *Just Change*, due out in June 2008, will be on Human Rights and Development. For further information please contact [justchange@dev-zone.org](mailto:justchange@dev-zone.org).

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**Humanitarian Emergencies – Do volunteers help or hinder?**

The relative ease of global travel enables virtually anybody to go to a disaster zone. But 'disaster tourists' who want to lend a hand may harm the very people they are there to help, themselves or other practitioners.



**An interview with Kumi Naidoo**

We talk with Kumi Naidoo, the esteemed South African activist who was expelled from school at age 15 for anti-apartheid activities, holds a doctorate in political science from Oxford University and is now CEO of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. He tells us that volunteering 'should be seen as a political act, an act of citizenship, an act of personal transformation'.



**Overseas volunteering: Who is determining whose needs?**

Two opposing writers go head-to-head over the worth of short-term overseas volunteering programmes—how do you ensure they do more good than harm?

VOLUNTEER FOR VICTORY

# The history of volun

**W**hile informal volunteering exists in all societies and has done so for centuries, the European notion of formal volunteering can be traced back to religious roots. From the Middle Ages onwards, the Roman Catholic Church promoted volunteerism in order to run its churches, alms houses and hospitals.

The late nineteenth century saw a growth in formal volunteering amongst the wealthy reflecting both an increase in leisure time and sense of obligation to care for the poor. The development of social welfare systems during the early part of the twentieth century meant the state took on many of the responsibilities previously met by these volunteers. Volunteering once again stepped in during times of crisis such as the Great Depression, when the state was unable to cope.

Within developing countries informal volunteering remains an essential part of solving day to day problems. Formalised volunteering began to take shape after decolonisation with the growth of volunteering programmes such as the Lagos Voluntary Workcamps Organization in Nigeria and the schemes in Cuba that virtually eliminated illiteracy in the 1960s.

The term volunteering has had a long military history. The First and Second World Wars saw young men being asked to volunteer for military service and women for a wide range of duties on the home front. The Second World War also saw the start in many countries of community volunteering being offered as an alternative to military service. *Photo: Imperial War Museum/Johnathan Foss*



A volunteer street collector collects money for the Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind. *Photo: Royal NZ Foundation for the Blind*



## International Volunteering

The missionary movement provided what could be seen as the first international volunteers, dating back 2000 years. The history of secular international volunteering can be traced back to the horrors of the First World War. In 1920 an international work camp made up of Austrian, English, French, German and Swiss volunteers went to rebuild a village near Verdun that had been destroyed during the war. This action led to the creation of Service Civil International (SCI), the first modern voluntary service movement and the inspiration to the many that started internationally during the 1920s and 30s.

In 1934, SCI sent its first group of European volunteers to India. This became the basis of many of the longstanding international volunteering programmes such as the British Volunteering Programme (of which VSO is a part), Peace Corps and the Deutsche Entwicklungsdienst (German Development Service) and eventually resulted in the UN Volunteers Programme.

International volunteering was initially seen as a way of building cross-border friendships between young people and took on a new relevance post Second World War, contributing to reconstruction efforts. Governments and religious organisations have received particular criticism for using volunteers to promote ideologically driven world views. In 1967 Project TROY, a US propaganda think-tank, proposed the idea of young US citizens going to developing countries to enable face to face promotion of democracy and to fight communism. The result was the US government sponsored Peace Corps. During the Cold War, UNESCO set up the Committee for International Voluntary Service, supporting volunteers who crossed both West to East and East to West in order to create the inter-cultural ties that were politically discouraged.

## Volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand has a strong culture of informal volunteering within all sectors of society, providing mutual support, maintaining culture and contributing to one's own sense of self.

Measurements of volunteering have shown that in 2004 more than one million people gave more than 270 million hours in voluntary service.



In 2006-07 Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) had 149 volunteers working in 16 countries.

## Key Players

### The United Nations: Volunteerism for Development (V4D)

Volunteering was first recognised by the United Nations soon after its creation in 1948, through the UNESCO Co-ordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS). The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme was created in 1971 with a mission to harness the contribution of volunteers for international development. Today, UNV focuses on advocacy for global volunteering and directly recruits around 5000 volunteers from 155 countries for volunteer assignments each year; more than 75% of volunteers are from developing countries.

### Universal Declaration of Volunteering

In 1990 the UN, together with the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE), drew up the 'Universal Declaration of Volunteering', which puts forward guidelines for what volunteering should try to achieve and how it should be approached.

# teering



Photo: Cameron Karsten



Volunteers help save the lives of stranded whales by keeping their skins wet. Photo: Volunteer NZ

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## Voluntary Vocabulary

**Volunteering:** The Oxford Dictionary provides two relevant definitions of a volunteer — a person who freely offers to take part in an enterprise or undertake a task; or a person who works for an organisation without being paid. As well as unpaid work, undertaken of free will, volunteering also implies a notion of work done for a perceived common good.

**International Volunteering:** Refers to people of one country volunteering in another country. It is not just people going from rich countries to poor countries. South to South volunteering; South to North volunteering; and the better known North to South volunteering are all part of the mix.

**Formal and Informal Volunteering:** In recognition that all sorts of people do unrecognised and untrackable voluntary work for their family or friends, and in supporting their own and other peoples' communities, the terms formal volunteering and informal volunteering have emerged. Signing up with VSA to work in a Vanuatu hospital or being sent by the UN to take part in unpaid work to assist with tsunami relief is formal volunteering; being caught in massive floods while on holiday and pitching in to help the locals, or looking after your neighbour's kids for free are examples of the sort of informal volunteering that practically everyone does without giving a second thought.

**Voluntary Sector:** This is used to distinguish community groups, not-for-profits, non-governmental and similar organisations from the private and public (government) sectors. Many voluntary sector organisations do employ paid as well as voluntary workers. In a world where private sector utilises volunteers and gets involved in development work, where NGOs and businesses form partnerships, and where NGOs tender for government contracts, delineation of the voluntary sector becomes increasingly difficult.

**Corporate Volunteering:** This involves schemes whereby corporations will volunteer a portion of staff time to be used for community or development projects. Some people applaud the private sector for its

growing social conscience, others remain skeptical, citing instances where businesses use corporate volunteering as a cheap way to improve their public image while diverting attention from other less ethical elements of their business practices.

**Cyber or Virtual Volunteering:** Allows people to volunteer remotely, creating web pages, translating documents and completing work at a distance utilising the ever-increasing range and sophistication of information and communication technologies. More than 40% of virtual volunteering is undertaken by people from developing countries.

**Voluntourism** is a holiday that combines or includes a period working for a project in the community you are visiting. A voluntourism industry is springing up that caters to a growing number of people hoping to merge adventure, holiday and helping others. The idea of volunteers wanting quick bursts of the volunteering experience can raise the shackles of those who believe that the evidence indicates long-term volunteers are more useful for recipient communities.

**Forced volunteering:** As the merits of volunteering are now extolled by public and private sector, it seems the notion of free will in volunteering might be under threat. New Zealand's now terminated Community Taskforce scheme came under criticism as a thinly disguised work-for-dole scheme forcing unemployed people into 'volunteering'. If your boss volunteers you, or you are required to undertake a voluntary placement in order to graduate, is it the manifestation of a new age of charity, or just plain old being ripped off?

**Paying to volunteer:** So enthusiastic are people to be involved in international development projects they're willing to pay. In some cases this is a legitimate way to acknowledge there are costs involved for communities (as well as benefits, one hopes) in hosting a volunteer, and that the volunteer is usually in a better position to pay their way than their hosts. In other instances the money goes straight to the private placement agency's coffers and doesn't reach the community at all. The desire to do good is now big business.

### International Volunteer Day

In 1985, the UN adopted 5 December as International Volunteer Day—now widely celebrated by voluntary agencies in Aotearoa New Zealand and throughout the world.

### A Decade of Volunteering

As part of the launch of the declaration, the UN declared 2000-2010 the decade of 'volunteering and civil society'. The year 2001 was proclaimed the 'International Year of Volunteers', and 126 countries marked the occasion by co-sponsoring a UN General Assembly resolution containing recommendations to support volunteering. This recognises volunteering as an integral part of any strategy aimed at poverty reduction and social inclusion, and acknowledges the role of volunteering in reaching the Millennium Development Goals.

### International Volunteer Organisations

IAVE, founded in 1970 by a small group of women from around the world, is an active non-governmental international body with members in more than 50 countries which

meets regularly to discuss issues of volunteering. <http://www.iave.org>

Other organisations supporting international volunteerism include the USA's Peace Corps, the UK's VSO (Volunteer Service Overseas), Europe's European Volunteer Centre (CEV) and the AVSO (Association of Voluntary Service Organisations) and International Voluntary Programs Association (IVPA) from the Americas.

### Aotearoa Volunteer Organisations

#### VSA

Te Tūao Tāwāhi Volunteer Service Abroad is New Zealand's largest volunteer sending agency. VSA was established in 1962 and now sends skilled volunteers to seventeen countries throughout Asia, Africa and the Pacific, usually for two year periods. <http://www.vsa.org.nz>

#### Mahitahi

Mahitahi is the official Catholic agency which seeks New Zealander volunteers to work on projects in communities in Oceania, sharing their gifts and skills. It responds to requests

for assistance from Pacific Island Dioceses who have identified and prioritised development projects. <http://www.mahitahi.org>

#### Volunteering NZ

The New Zealand representative on IAVE is Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ), an association of volunteer centres and organisations strongly committed to volunteering. VNZ's mission is to create an environment which supports, promotes, values and encourages effective volunteering by the people of Aotearoa New Zealand. <http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz>

#### Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS)

The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) was established in 2003 to address overarching issues affecting the community and voluntary sector, to raise the profile of the sector within government and to promote volunteering. <http://www.ocvs.govt.nz>

# Volunteering from a Māori perspective

In 2007, the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector released the report *Mahi Aroha: Māori perspectives on volunteering and cultural obligations*. This article presents some of its key findings.

*It's how we can show our aroha, not just for our whānau, but for whoever is in need. It's what we're here for. (Wahine, 40s)*

Within Māori communities, the concept of volunteering is in one sense alien and, in another, an essential part of everyday life. Differing understandings have meant that mainstream volunteering policy and support mechanisms have not always appreciated the role of Māori volunteering and the best ways to support its contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand society.

In response to perceived barriers to volunteering associated with government legislation, policy and practice, the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector commissioned research into the nature of cultural obligations and, in particular, the relationship between the fulfillment of cultural obligations and volunteering for Māori. The following article is taken from the resulting report *Mahi Aroha: Māori perspectives on volunteering and cultural obligations*.

The research findings from the study revealed that volunteering for Māori is based significantly upon the notion of whanaungatanga and the benefits, both for individuals and the wider community, derived from contributing to the common good. Within a collectivist cultural tradition such as Māori culture, conceptions of self are intrinsically linked to aspects of nature, wairua, mauri, whānau and mana, and all are intertwined. Hence, personal well-being depends, both immediately and ultimately, on the well-being of the community as a whole.

For many Māori interviewed for the research, the usual concept of 'volunteering' did



Volunteer preparing food for meeting of Te Runaka ki Otautahi. Food preparation by volunteers is an integral part of many activities, for example, on Marae, in churches, at sporting events or fundraising. Photo: M Woods

not accurately reflect their worldview or their own experiences of and motivations for carrying out unpaid work for whānau, hapū, iwi and other Māori organisations and individuals. The term 'mahi aroha'—work performed out of love, sympathy or caring and through a sense of duty—was considered more appropriate. For the purpose of the research this was defined as 'voluntary or unpaid work or mahi you have undertaken, not including day-to-day household maintenance or care of immediate family sharing your home'.

The range of mahi aroha activities undertaken was extremely diverse and drew on a wide range of skills. Much of the activity was whānau, hapū and iwi related and was based around marae. Advisory work in relation to government-led consultations and policy processes, including work on Treaty of Waitangi matters, was also a significant part of mahi aroha activity. Several of the participants were also involved in the establishment, management or delivery of kaupapa Māori projects, programmes and services. While some of the participants were involved in volunteer work for mainstream organisations, mahi aroha related to participants' whānau was their first priority. This mahi aroha included work for household members and also assistance to whanaunga and others.

*If there's whānau or one of us in need, we do what we can. Money, material things, our own needs...they are all second to the whānau in need. (Wahine, 40s)*

Research participants in this study identified a broad range of motives for the mahi aroha they undertook, including aroha, peace of mind, personal and whānau security, reciprocity and duty. For many participants, being asked why they undertook the mahi was in itself curi-

ous as they did not see this mahi aroha as in any way separate from their everyday lives. Some people, in fact, thought the question itself odd and said so:

*I don't know how to answer that question. You do it because it's part of your life. I don't ask myself why I'm doing it—it's part of who I am. (Tāne, 60s)*

A majority of the research participants also identified cultural survival as a core motive for their mahi aroha in the contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand context. In this sense, their mahi aroha often reflected what they saw as their most important duty or obligation.

*If we don't look after our marae, we're not Māori any more; we're something else. (Kuia)*

Most participants who learnt their tikanga from kaumātua and through lifelong involvement in te ao Māori felt that mahi aroha, especially work done for Māori, was rarely, if ever, a choice in the sense that the word is usually understood. Rather, it was undertaken out of a strongly felt sense of duty to whānau and other collectives.

*It doesn't really apply to the things I do—they're more stuff that has to be done, it's not voluntary in that way. (Wahine, 50s)*

This duty was entrenched in tikanga and experienced as a moral imperative as part of being Māori.

The report 'Mahi Aroha: Māori perspectives on volunteering and cultural obligations' is available from the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector, <http://www.ocvs.govt.nz/>.



**Common links across research participants' motives for mahi aroha**

**Tikanga**

Doing what is believed to be the 'right thing to do', according to Māori values and world-views as passed down by one's kaumātua and ancestors.

**Cultural survival and recovery**

Doing whatever is needed to ensure that tikanga Māori survives and thrives

**Extent of need**

Responding to clear and urgent needs related to poverty, social stressors and lack of support for Māori values



Tarisi Vunidilo (Workshop coordinator) working with Fijian children in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Leo Vunidilo, Merewairita Vunidilo and Edith Rogers are learning to make their own Fijian barkcloth (masi) designs. Photo: FIJITUWAWA Photos

# Pacific perspectives on cultural obligations & volunteering

## Finding meaning in what you do

**IRIS WEBSTER**, Senior Policy Analyst at the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector presents findings from new research into concepts of volunteering among Pacific people living in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Aotearoa New Zealand government policy on volunteering, created in 2002, describes a vision of 'a society with a high level of volunteering, where the many contributions people make to the common good through volunteering and fulfilment of cultural obligations are actively supported and valued'. The policy goes on to describe volunteers as 'those who, of their own free will, undertake unpaid work outside their immediate household, to benefit the common good'.

'Free will' can be defined as a situation when one is not forced into doing something that one does not want to do. However, how do you apply such a term to Pacific nations where people are brought up to believe that it is their 'obligation'

to contribute unpaid time to their communities?

Currently there is an absence of literature and research that looks into Pacific people and their views on volunteering as well as their views on their 'obligations'. In 2005, the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector received funding to carry out research on this very topic. The research was aimed at exploring the concept of volunteering and unpaid work as a cultural obligation amongst Pacific people living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Thanks to the Pacific Section Team at the Family Centre (Lower Hutt, Wellington) who carried out the research on more than 1,200 participants, this work will be published in mid-2008. From this research, I'd like to provide some thoughts and insights that focus on what being a Pacific person and volunteering or cultural obligation may mean.

### Understanding the Concept of Volunteering and fitting in Cultural Obligation

Ethnocentric concepts of volunteering are grounded in free will and choice; a no obligation act that has been chosen by one's own volition. Free will also implies an act that one may be held morally responsible for. These ideas relate purely to the individual conception of self. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, to volunteer is to offer one's time, efforts, assistance and help in various forms to a task without requiring further contact, connections or ongoing relationships. In a Pacific person's paradigm of thinking, the individualised conception of 'the self' is non-existent.

According to the research, in the worldview of a Pacific person, volunteering for the sake of a cause that has no ties to genealogy dismisses the relational nature of the Pacific self. The act of 'volunteering' for Pacific Peoples is a moral and ethical responsibility to maintain one's iden-

tity with culture and to uphold traditions, passed on through traditional roles and responsibilities to the collective group and to one's own family. It is not 'free will' or 'choice' that drives these initiatives, but a cultural obligation to uphold these values. The very act of giving to the community means that one's cultural traditions will continue and be instilled in future generations.

In the research, it was found that the word 'volunteering' was not appropriate to identify the contributions Pacific Peoples make. One such reaction was:

*It's a horrible word! (Pan Pacific young peoples Faafaletui focus group)*

This reaction is due to the belief that 'volunteering is what we do to strangers'. Other comments include:

*in the Cook Islands and Samoa there is no such thing as voluntary – it's our way of life (Pan Pacific Elders Faafaletui focus group)*

*Volunteering is going down the road and giving blood to a stranger (Samoan young peoples Faafaletui focus group)*

These reactions to the terms 'volunteer', 'volunteering' or 'voluntary' suggest that the term volunteering (in any form) does not adequately explain Pacific Peoples' contributions to each other, as it tends to presume that one is detached and separate from one's actions. From a Pacific person's point of view, volunteering would be better applied if it meant: 'acts that assist out of free will' or 'acts that assist out of one's choice' to people or organisations external to one's Aiga<sup>1</sup> or Aiga-like formations.

Pacific Elders and young people that participated in the research considered that Pacific people have a moral and ethical responsibility to care, support and assist Aiga. It is done out of respect and this value is passed on from generation to generation so that a sense of cultural identity can be based on this foundation of respect. Volunteering for strangers is not required if there are Pacific families and communities that need help:

*I am Tongan and I have a large extended family. As a girl I used to look after my grandfather... freely knowing I am not being paid for doing his washing or cooking for him. We do this out of respect for him...I grew up that way*

Volunteering grounded in individual free will and choice has no ongoing commitment and is therefore separate from Aiga freely coming in to give of their time. The matter of care, support and assistance to one's Aiga is not a choice, it is a cultural obligation to give of one's time to look after family or care for something that holds traditional value—essentially it is these actions that continue the cultural traditions Pacific people are proud to be connected to.



Alfreda Hughes serving out refreshment after a Fijian dance practise in Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand. Alfreda's mother prepared the refreshments and Alfreda helped serve them out to the rest of the youth group. Photo: FIJITUWAWA Photos

<sup>1</sup> Aiga – Samoan term meaning Family

# Humanitarian Emergencies

## – Do volunteers help or hinder?

Humanitarian emergencies are dramatic situations that foster immediate and heartfelt responses - including the desire to volunteer. After 16 years working in the humanitarian sector, **HEATHER MACLEOD** questions the impact of these gestures.



Imagine for a moment—there has been a major humanitarian disaster in a country near you. The plight of the affected population is leading all the major news bulletins around the world. People affected are very distressed and desperate for help. Full-time, professionally trained humanitarian workers are mobilised to help immediately. But there are others who want to do something meaningful to help. Many generously give money to organisations that are experienced in responding to such emergencies. Others want to offer their skills and time to be a frontline responder, helping in whatever way they can to make a difference. Some offer their services to organisations, while others decide that they will go to the crisis zone independently to do what they can to assist. The relative ease of global travel, the relaxation of visa requirements by countries affected by emergencies and the inevitable stresses on local governments enables virtually anybody to go to an emergency zone. Should volunteers be there? What added value do they offer to communities and what potential harm can they cause?

These are the ethical questions that this article will try and address. Examples and reflections come from my experience as a humanitarian worker. I acknowledge that there are also challenging ethical issues related to full-time professionals in the humanitarian industry. I struggle with them each day. But the focus of this article is the role of the volunteer.

Disasters occur in complex political, social and economic environments and those responding must have knowledge and skills in humanitarian practice as well as a great deal of personal energy and sensitivity.

There are two main categories of volunteers. First, there are the appropriately skilled volunteers who are recruited and prepared for a cross-cultural response by an experienced humanitarian organisation. Many of them are able to make themselves available to the same organisation for short-term assignments on a regular basis and so often bring with them considerable experience. These volunteers are professionally prepared and the only difference between them and the full-time humanitarian worker is that they are not paid a full salary. The challenge they face is to keep up with the ever-evolving standards and knowledge.

The second group of volunteers are those who are unskilled and inexperienced. This

type of volunteer believes that an extra pair of hands must be needed to provide care or comfort to people in such distress and so they offer to play with children or provide practical support such as driving trucks, building, painting or just supporting the teams of people who are responding. A few just seem to want to see for themselves what has happened and they may help out in some way for a day or so, sometimes longer. This last example of a volunteer is sometimes called a 'disaster tourist'.

This second group of volunteers may or may not be affiliated to an organisation. But if they are, it will generally be to a new and inexperienced non-governmental organisation. Any screening processes or orientation for these candidates will be minimal. Many lack experience of working in cross-cultural situations. Most lack any knowledge of the practices and standards that have been developed within the humanitarian industry over past decades. As a result of these skill gaps, this type of volunteer can make errors that can harm either the very people they are there to help, themselves or other practitioners.

Here are some practical examples. In 2005, following the Pakistan earthquake, appropriate winter clothing was needed for the population. There were options for this non-food delivery. The preferred option was (and is always) to coordinate distributions between NGOs, the UN and government. While this approach may initially appear to slow down the process, it does reduce the risk of excluding the most vulnerable. What appeared to happen in Pakistan was that many volunteer groups responded by distributing in what is called the 'truck and chuck' method. This is when aid is thrown out of the back of a truck to a waiting crowd. The result is normally chaos, with the biggest and strongest in the crowd pushing to the front, obtaining clothes and those more vulnerable missing out. The most vulnerable people then dig through rejected piles of clothes on the ground for whatever they can find that might be of any use. The lack of dignity and inability for the most vulnerable to access such aid is one example of why standards and agreed practices for distribution have been developed by the humanitarian industry. That is

why volunteers need to know these standards and be affiliated with a recognised humanitarian aid organisation.

Albania provides a second example of an ethical dilemma related to untrained volunteers. In 1999, I was conducting an assessment of separated children and visited a Kosovar refugee camp. I found separated children being housed in tents with young foreign volunteers who could not speak the same language as the children. These volunteers were totally committed to helping the children but were oblivious to the critical processes involved in the protection of separated children. The volunteers did not know that they must contact the mandated organisations to register the children nor did they know about the *Guiding Principles of Separated and Unaccompanied Children*. The placement of the children away from their community plus delays in tracing and reunification could have resulted in harm to the child. But this was not all. Other child protection risks were present. These volunteers had not been screened by the newly formed organisation nor were any codes of conduct in place to reduce the risk of abuse to the children by these humanitarian aid workers.

The protection issue is a critical one for the humanitarian community and has become more prominent in recent years. In 2001, the humanitarian community was shocked by serious allegations that humanitarian workers were sexually exploiting women and children in West Africa. Since that time other such cases have been identified in other parts of the world. As a result all organisations in the industry are expected to have developed strict protection policies and codes of conduct. Such policies reduce the risk of abusers having access to vulnerable populations

and demand that humanitarian workers report any suspicious behaviour for appropriate investigation. Independent volunteers or inexperienced voluntary organisations without

such policies in place may inadvertently put children and women at risk of harm.

The ethical dilemmas are not only related to potential harm to the beneficiaries but also to the volunteer and other humanitarian workers. The duty of care for any employer requires that the organisation take steps to minimise risk of harm to any staff member, whether paid or voluntary, by ensuring the person is managed effectively and by providing a supportive workplace. For those organisations in the humanitarian aid industry these practices are defined in the *Code*

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The American Red Cross trained Salvadorian Red Cross mental health volunteers who then conducted the small group children sessions using the American Red Cross coloring book "After the Earthquake".

of Good Practice (People in Aid). When an inexperienced voluntary organisation or independent volunteer has not considered the requirements for duty of care there are questions of ethics to be asked. For example, is it appropriate for a volunteer to arrive without health insurance or with insufficient money to meet daily needs? Should any person be in a foreign country without adequate security procedures or social support? Who is responsible when an independent volunteer falls ill?

As a humanitarian practitioner I have met people in these situations and have been involved in assisting them. While on an individual basis I have been sympathetic and responsive to their situation, it has made me question who should be responsible for them. It has made me grateful to be part of an organisation that ensures I have the appropriate skills and ex-

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perience and has policies and procedures that are supportive of my well-being. It allows me to do my job without worrying about such things. It also raises the real issue that sometimes helping inexperienced volunteers can take resources and time that experienced staff should be giving to the emergency victims.

Finally, humanitarian workers are no longer viewed as neutral parties and so there are increasing security concerns for workers. Those entering the world of humanitarian aid must be informed of the risks and do all they can to minimise these. A small but offensive action in a sensitive political environment can quickly escalate and have a negative impact on the entire humanitarian community. Ill prepared volunteers are not excluded

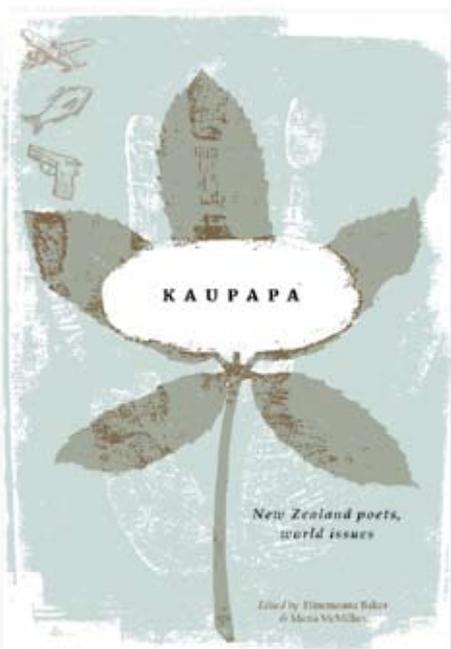
At a distribution center in a Methodist church in Trincomale, Sri Lanka, volunteers unload boxes of crackers to be distributed to tsunami victims. Credit: (c) 2005 Paul Jeffrey, Courtesy of Photoshare



from this humanitarian community and they must also understand that the actions they take affect others.

To summarise, the humanitarian community benefits significantly from the presence of volunteers with professional skills and cross-cultural experience that are those affiliated to respected organisations. However, the independent volunteer or those associated with inexperienced humanitarian organisations creates a unique set of ethical issues relating to their lack of skills and knowledge in key areas of humanitarian practice.

*Heather McLeod has had 16 years experience in the humanitarian sector. She is currently completing an MPhil in Development Studies at Massey University.*



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# Feature interview

## A conversation with **KUMI NAIDOO**, Secretary General of **CIVICUS** and founder of the **Global Call to Action against Poverty**



### What do you think is the central way volunteers can contribute to the meeting of the MDGs?

One of the central ways volunteers can contribute is not through the two-three years they spend in the field but by using the knowledge and sensitivity they have gained through volunteering to influence their own government's policies. We in the developing world hope that the knowledge, the suffering and the challenges that they have seen will sensitise them to the responsibility their own governments have, in terms of trade justice, in terms of improving the quality and quantity of aid and in acting on things like debt cancellation. These are the real macro issues that they need to be ambassadors for when they come back. I don't think this is happening sufficiently in most cases but I can see that this role for volunteers is increasing; more volunteer sending agencies are looking at how they can use the volunteer as a resource, not simply just in the field but when they come back.

The other role they can play is in working for local NGOs in the direct delivery of social services, often to the most underserved and vulnerable communities, say for example people living with HIV/AIDS or people in geographically vulnerable places. I think they can contribute here in a direct sense.

However, the area of volunteering that really needs to grow is that of skills transfer. Going to help feed more children and build more classrooms is important, but we need to work on transferring advocacy skills and helping the partners that receive the volunteers to get the skills to lobby their governments, plan a media campaign or to use ICT for advocacy purposes. These are skills that are often in short supply in many developing countries.

### What can young people who may not have these skills offer as volunteers?

Being young is not a crime, it's not a reason why someone should not be a very good volunteer. Some young people may already have the IT skills needed, it just depends on

what the receiving organisations are looking for. The volunteer sending agency therefore needs to do two things. One is to make sure that the prospective volunteers have the skills that have been requested by the partners. Secondly, if young people don't have the skills then they need to invest in them and provide the training to make sure they do, holding them back to teach them the skills if need be. An advantage of young volunteers is that they are often the ones that will be most passionate about doing public education work on the issues on return to their own countries.

### In advocacy related volunteering, is there a risk that if you bring an advocacy strategy from one country to another it may not necessarily be appropriate?

Well, that is absolutely right; it could very well be that way. However I'm looking at a whole package of technical advocacy skills, how to draft a good media release or how to do media work. These are common technical things you could use in any context.

### Is there any advantage in doing virtual volunteering?

Yes, there are less carbon emissions, it's more cost effective, and cyber volunteering is on the rise at the moment, big time. I'm not saying it's a choice between one or the other, I think both are good in different ways. There's less opportunity for skills transfer with virtual volunteering but let's be honest, there are a lot of myths about skills transfer in traditional volunteering. When I look at the world, I would say 50% of volunteering, minimum, is filling a gap. There is some skills transfer in the generic sense, but very few NGOs are going to be able to have you as a staff member with your sole role being to transfer your skills. Instead you could work on skills transfer as part of your job.

### Some people accuse volunteers who travel overseas as 'neo-colonialists'; What do you think of this?

I think neo-colonialism, as a description of international volunteering, is a bit extreme as a criticism. The majority of volunteers from rich countries going to poor countries that I've encountered are increasingly more culturally sensitive and the agencies sending them are investing more time and training to make sure the volunteers understand the cultural context to which they are going. I think there is work to be done to make sure we don't embrace an idea that one-size fits all, in the sense that what might work in a developed country might not work in a developing country.



Community activism in New Orleans against plans to condemn large parts of the neighborhood

The bottom line is that in my mind, the volunteer probably gets much more than they give or leave behind. That's ok provided it's in terms of knowledge, perspective and the development of new skills.

### **Volunteering is not always as effective as it could be; what do you think needs to happen to make sure it is effective?**

First, we shouldn't overstate the value of it. Volunteering on its own is not going to save the world. It's going to build solidarity, so celebrate that and recognise it for what it is. Right now the world is divided along so many lines, so ensuring that people have greater dialogue and understanding with each other can only be a good thing.

Secondly, if we want to improve the quality of volunteering, you have to invest in the training and development of the volunteers by the volunteer sending agencies and make sure that what the community needs, the volunteer is genuinely going to do. Volunteers need time when they arrive in a country, a good part of three months, to look at how the skills and the way they transfer them are adapted for the local context. A volunteer doesn't need to be trying to learn technical skills in the middle of trying to deal with the cultural and the logistical issues. It's not ideal.

What's also needed and what some of the volunteer sending agencies have now developed are monitoring and support mechanisms for the people on the ground; this is something that could be strengthened. Volunteer sending agencies also need to work more effectively together. Rather than each of the agencies competing for the 'sexy' projects, they should look at coordination, realising that in certain situations it may be better to send three-four people from three-four sending agencies, from three-four countries to have a real impact. Bringing these people together would provide a learning opportunity for the volunteers, not only through their interactions with the local African communities but also through the people from the different volunteer sending agencies.

### **What are the central issues of concern to domestic and international volunteering in the future?**

One is a big strategic challenge; how do we bridge the gap between the world of social action and the world of volunteering. Most

social activists, whether they are in the peace movement, environmental movement, trade justice movement and so on are largely volunteers. They need to embrace the idea that they are giving voluntarily of themselves, their time, energy and money, and not feel that volunteering is just nice old ladies serving in soup kitchens. On the other hand, those who are doing the service delivery side through domestic volunteering—who are caricatured as nice, loving, caring people who want to do good deeds—need to recognise they have the right and responsibility, based on what they are learning, to challenge policy. For example, if they are a volunteer in a shelter for women they should be thinking 'what is this experience teaching me about the laws there should be relating to domestic



Young volunteers in India, wearing Red Ribbon T Shirts and caps, commit themselves to help spread correct information and knowledge on HIV/AIDS, just days before World AIDS Day  
© 2005 Anil Gulati, Courtesy of Photoshare

violence?' Based on their conversations with women in the shelters, they acquire knowledge and understanding that can contribute to systemic change.

The crude way of seeing social activism vs volunteering, is that social activism is political struggle to bring out fundamental structural changes to eradicate the problem, whereas volunteering can be seen as delivering services to ameliorate the problem, to reduce the effects. But the challenge is for those who are doing the structural, policy-focused work to be in better dialogue with the folks that are in the front providing services, to ensure they are not policy making in a vacuum.

Another issue is how we balance the imperative of professionalising volunteering, on the one hand, and not bureaucratising what is an intrinsically spontaneous and organic kind of field. Volunteering is being professionalised as a field, domestically especially. For example, If you have to sign a contract to be a volunteer, and it says these are your responsibilities and you think 'I am doing this

on a voluntary basis, this looks too legalistic, it looks like I could get into trouble', it might put people off. I'm not saying everything about the professionalisation is bad, some of it is really good, the training and the resources for example. There needs to be a little bit of balance; there is a risk that it could get a little too extreme on the professionalising side.

Thirdly, there is the dichotomy between who volunteers and who is volunteered upon. In South Africa, in the current context, it's whites volunteering to help blacks, or domestically it might mean Pākeha volunteering to help Māori because that's where the knowledge, skills, privilege and resources might be. So one of the challenges is the need to invest in the socially excluded communities, much more than we are doing, to ensure that the

culture of volunteering takes place, so it is not simply seen as purely the historically or currently privileged community doing the volunteering. This will help create legitimacy for the whole political role of volunteering.

One thing we have to remember is that volunteering is contested in some cultures, not only amongst Māori, with a different understanding of the notion of community and self help. One example I'll give you is of Central and Eastern Europe. When you talk about volunteering there it's not really a favorable thing at the moment. Under the authoritarian rule they lived under for a long time, it was 'you, you and you, volunteer'.

So I think there needs to be some political repositioning of volunteering. Volunteering should not be seen solely as an act of compassion, caring, or giving. It should be seen as a political act, an act of citizenship, an act of personal transformation; it's an act of solidarity.

With regards to the future of international volunteering, I think the issues that are already on the table, those such as power dynamics and cultural dominance, will become sharper. We also need to be looking at volunteering as a two-way street. If you are looking at an issue like HIV/AIDs in a rich country like the USA, I believe there may be skills and competencies in Africa that are much more advanced in certain areas than they would be in the USA, due to the depth and scale of the problem there. Obviously it's not going to be an equal flow of people, but this is an opportunity we should be looking at.

*To find out more about civicus, go to <http://civicus.org>.*



Volunteers in Nigeria from the Global Xchange between UK and Nigeria. © VSO



VSO Youth for Development volunteer with a colleague in Indonesia. © VSO/Patrick Guitjens.

# Mind the gap year

**In August last year, international development charity Voluntary Service Overseas called on young people not to waste their gap years with spurious voluntary work in the developing world.**

**They tell us why.**

**ABIGAIL FULBROOK, VSO**

The story was a result of much anecdotal evidence gathered by VSO from people, especially students, who had been let down by the organisations to whom they had paid thousands of dollars for volunteering opportunities during their gap years. VSO had heard about people who had been left stranded, robbed or expected to live on a diet of cheese and bread for three months.

Hannah took up a placement teaching in India with a commercial organisation. She said, 'I paid over £1000 to teach English and maths to children in Pune. I didn't have any training or preparation from the organisation before I went, and they didn't expect me to have any qualifications. I had a really tough time and suffered from culture shock, as India is so different from anywhere else, which I wasn't ready for. I turned up at the learning centre and the teachers didn't even know I was coming.'

Sarah took a gap year during her time at university. She paid £3000 to work in Costa Rica, which covered a basic TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) course, insurance, flights and transport in-country, and reassurance that help would be just a phone call away. 'When I arrived at the airport I was given a sheet of paper with directions to the village, the number of the bus to catch, and told someone would come and pick me up in his truck', she said. 'My bag got stolen on the bus and the company did nothing to help even though I contacted them immediately. They provided me with no material for teach-

ing, and I found out that representatives had visited the village only twice, basically to find me somewhere to stay. No thanks to the company, the family I stayed with was extremely nice. But the company was a huge disap-

**Not only may these bad experiences deter young people from volunteering again, but volunteers might actually be doing harm to the communities they are supposed to be helping.**

pointment. Despite the fact that my job was a pilot project, and no one had ever done it before, no one checked I had arrived safely or contacted me to see how it was going. From what I could see, all the money I paid went on marketing.'



Volunteers from Global Xchange, run by VSO and the British Council. An exchange between the UK and Nigeria. © VSO

All too often it appears that the organisation decides what is good for the community, rather than working in partnership to figure out how the organisation and volunteers can work together with the community to meet their needs. VSO found that many people didn't realise these kinds of 'voluntourism' activities make up a multi-million dollar industry, dominated by commercial operations.

There are two major concerns that VSO has: not only may these bad experiences deter young people from volunteering again, but volunteers might actually be doing harm to the communities they are supposed to be helping. After 50 years experience, the charity knows that young people can be effective in international development work, but the work must be rooted in mutual respect and focused on the needs of young people to ensure they gain from it.

VSO works to five principles when developing its youth programmes. First and second, volunteers need to be engaged in work of real value to the communities they seek to serve and the programmes must be rooted in mutual respect between the people involved. This will be difficult in programmes that seem to suggest that young people from developed countries can solve problems that young people in developing countries cannot solve for themselves. The third and fourth principles are that programmes need to be pro-active in shaping learning that is more than natural development, and diversity of volunteers makes a substantial contribution to programme quality. And finally, programme design needs to strike an effective balance between the interests of the young people themselves, the communities they seek to serve and the social policy objectives for which the programme is funded.

*To find out more, go to <http://www.vso.org.uk>.*

# Overseas volunteering: Who is determining whose needs?

ANNIKA LINDORSSON

**C**onnecting people with communities in need<sup>i</sup> is the vision of Global Volunteer Network (GVN). A few years ago I graduated from university and wanted to get some experience in the development field, so I signed up with GVN. I acted as a volunteer coordinator at their Wellington office and I also volunteered in their Ecuador programme. This article explores my experience working with GVN in a wider discussion of the phenomena of for-profit organisations placing unskilled international volunteers in communities around the world.

GVN believes that 'local communities are in the best position to determine their needs.'<sup>i</sup> However, the exclusive GVN/local partner organisation contract prevents local organisations to take on any volunteers that have not applied through GVN (and paid the US\$350 administration fee).

And, as part of the application process, GVN scores the potential volunteer for things like age, education, and nationality. According to the GVN points system you are automatically a better and more desirable volunteer if you are from the US, Canada, or the UK (and a few other countries), than if you are from Nigeria, for example. Apparently, it is not uncommon to assume that 'just because a young person is from the UK, they will be of benefit to their host community.'<sup>ii</sup> From the GVN perspective, a person from one of the abovementioned countries is a) more likely to have the finances required; b) is easier to deal with because of their English speaking background (and sometimes first language English is required, when teaching for example); and c) is less likely to have difficulty getting visas, etc. All of this naturally makes sense. But it raises the question: Who is determining whose needs? Is the focus on the host community or on the volunteer? For example, I struggle to find the 'communities in need' under any of the seven reasons a volunteer ought to choose GVN, as listed on their website. I guess this should come as no surprise, seeing that 'organising volunteering programmes is now big business.'<sup>ii</sup> And in order to remain in business (and increase profits) it seems pretty obvious that an organ-

isation like GVN must focus on the needs of the volunteer.

Some argue that these types of volunteering programmes' lack focus on local needs, capacity building and empowerment, instead end up promoting dependence in host communities. From my experience with GVN, I would be surprised to find many volunteers familiar with any of these concepts. In fact, I cannot say that issues like these were widely discussed in the office either. In addition, one of the main problems GVN is facing is the lack of momentum and thus prospects for long-term change. There was little to no handover between old and new volunteers from one month to the next, and the wheel kept being re-invented over and over.

Along with the missing momentum, the poorly equipped GVN programmes can only struggle to offer much opportunity for long-term change. For example, during my volunteering stint in Ecuador we were 'researching' different organic fertilisers for the small-scale shrimp ponds in the area, a project initiated by one of the other volunteers. However, without any instruments at all—to measure pH for example—our work felt very token. Sometimes it was also hard to ignore the expectation (not from GVN but from communities) that volunteers should provide materials because the understanding is that they *can*. I found that there was often a misconception of the capacity of the volunteer, as well as a lack of understanding that even though volunteers pay for travelling to faraway places so they can pay to work, not all volunteers are made of money—a misunderstanding that was difficult to resolve since very few volunteers spoke Spanish (which again is another obvious problem).

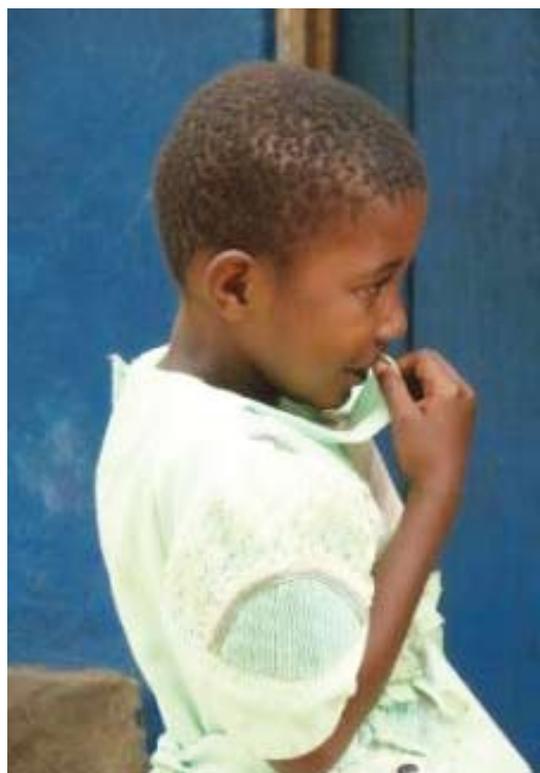
Regarding paying to 'work'; the limitation on how many volunteers are accepted into a programme each month is ability to house, not ability to offer work. Many days in Ecuador my colleagues and I wandered about wondering what to do, while new volunteers kept coming. Other days some of us found ourselves in way over our heads. I, for example, ended up being responsible for the end of year English exams in the local school.

So are these volunteering programmes doing more harm than good? I don't know. In terms of broadening horizons and offering personal growth opportunities for the vol-

unteer (along with a whole lot of 'feel good'), one only has to read the volunteer accounts on the GVN website—obviously some people are having a grand time partaking in these programmes, and hopefully they will grow into more socially responsible citizens from it. I am sure I have. And perhaps this is where we need to start. But I can't help but question how this kind of unskilled short-term volunteering can promote real change. 'Connecting people with communities in need'—unfortunately I think it stops here.

*Annika Lindorsson has a Masters in Development Studies from Uppsala University, Sweden*

**There was little to no handover between old and new volunteers from one month to the next, and the wheel kept being re-invented over and over.**



<sup>i</sup> GVN Website [www.volunteer.org.nz](http://www.volunteer.org.nz)

<sup>ii</sup> Gap years create 'new colonialists' Timesonline August 15, 2006

In the following two articles, the authors present a positive and negative view of overseas volunteering programmes. They use Global Volunteer Network (GVN), an international volunteer provider based out of Lower Hutt, Aotearoa, New Zealand as a case study.

COLIN SALISBURY, CEO AND FOUNDER, GLOBAL VOLUNTEER NETWORK (GVN)

I would like to offer the following statement in response to Annika Lindorsson's article. There have been a number of changes to GVN policies and practises since Annika Lindorsson was an employee with GVN in 2005 and I appreciate the opportunity to respond and add my own viewpoint on the important issue of ethical volunteering.

GVN was born with the hope that it would be propelled by people wanting to invest in creating a better world—and fly it did. It leapt from sending 240 volunteers in its first year to 1,520 volunteers two years later. The decision to launch GVN as a private organisation rather than a not-for-profit involved extensive research, soul searching and a long-term plan. By relying on profits made from services provided, I freed GVN from having to survive on grants and donations made by the



Photos: Global Volunteer Network

goodwill of the general public.

When people ask me if GVN is successful I say yes. But it has nothing to do with acquiring wealth—it is because I truly believe that our army of volunteers are making a difference and contributing to a better place for us all to live. Unfortunately not all organisations in the volunteer service industry measure success this way and criticisms have arisen from the fact that certain, non reputable, 'volunteer' organisations have sprung up with the focus of making a profit rather than making a difference.

To distinguish between social enterprises out to make a difference and less than reputable organisations out to make a profit I believe that intention and impact are paramount.

### Intention

The driving force and true purpose of an organisation can be difficult to uncover, especially when all that guides the volunteer is a website, but there are key questions you should ask: Is the organisation focused firstly on making a difference, rather than providing you with a 'good time'? Do they work with locally run partner organisations? Do they have testimonials?

It is correct to say that GVN believes that 'local communities are in the best position to determine their needs' and we work hard to ensure we help provide 'local solutions to local problems.' This means that GVN does not

**By relying on profits made from services provided, I freed GVN from having to survive on grants and donations made by the goodwill of the general public**

go into communities abroad, set up an office and tell the community what they need and we do not provide volunteers to replace jobs that would go to locals. Instead GVN identifies already existing, quality, local community organisations that are making a change within their chosen field and provides volunteers to assist and fill the gaps.

We also encourage our partners to attract local volunteers and have recently had our first volunteer sign up from Nigeria, who plans to volunteer in Kenya next year.

While the application process has evolved somewhat since the 'point system' it still remains a two-way process that is based on a

set of criteria determined by each partner organisation and the experience and skills a volunteer has to offer.

### Impact

While important, these days good intentions alone are not enough to qualify an organisation as a good volunteer service provider and nor should they be. You need to ask questions about where all those good intentions are going and the type of impact they are having: Does the organisation have a Foundation that raises money to support the projects? Do they have a long-term commitment to help the communities they work in? Do they provide every volunteer with in-depth information and resources? I have learnt that a well-informed volunteer and a well run partner organisation is a dynamite combination.

**Good intentions alone are not enough to qualify an organisation as a good volunteer service provider and nor should they be.**

GVN offers volunteers at least 30 hours of work per week in most programmes and we are currently working on a new resource guide to assist our partner organisations. This guide will be available online and will enable partners to access the guides of other partner organisations and exchange ideas on a global scale. It is also intended to cut down the time partners spend on administration and provide other crucial resources such as:

1. Handover procedures - standard processes to ensure continuity between volunteers.
2. Training guides - cover the educational and cultural topics our partners address and volunteers teach, such as conflict resolution and sexual health.
3. Orientation guides - volunteer training in community development issues such as gender, sustainability and participation.

Beyond the fact that GVN is directly contributing to the development of communities around the world through volunteer service, we are conscious of how volunteering directly benefits the volunteers themselves. Volunteering abroad adds an additional, crucial, layer to the personal development of an individual. Internal change and awareness of development issues is an additional key ingredient to any quality volunteer service organisation.

# Organisations

1. Does your organisation have a volunteering policy and what are the reasons behind it?
2. In your opinion, what are the risks associated with receiving volunteers?
3. What one thing would you change about the volunteers you receive or the agencies that send them?



NICOLA MEARS, RIO MUCHACHO ORGANIC FARM

*Rio Muchacho Organic farm in Ecuador offers volunteer opportunities, language courses and apprenticeships in organic farming and permaculture.*

**1.** We have extensive information for volunteers and certain policies concerning behaviour. Both of these help shape and select the volunteers that are suitable for our projects. The policies include things like no alcohol or drugs, and in some projects, no sexual relations with members of the community or project. We give potential volunteers background information to prepare them for the experience, so that their contribution is positive in all aspects, and as culturally sensitive as possible.

Projects that don't have clear policies regarding the areas mentioned are often not well regarded in the community. Visitors come and go but the locals stay. A constant stream of alcohol and drug consuming foreigners is not a good influence and can very negatively affect community and family life.

**2.** Volunteers can have a very negative effect on a community if the process is not guided. Sharing is good but there needs to be an appreciation for the local culture rather than

trying to have locals appreciate the culture of the volunteer. This can create a sense of cultural poverty.

**3.** Don't send volunteers that don't speak any of the local language, people who think that they will learn just by listening; this is not a fair situation for either parts. The volunteer feels isolated because they can't communicate. It is unfair to expect local people to struggle to communicate so that the volunteer can learn the language. It can be very intimidating for local people...and who ends up helping who?

The presence of volunteers can be of great help in a community. They bring skills that might not exist in the community and funds to achieve projects that might otherwise not be possible. It is key that these programmes are well managed.



PROGRAM MANAGER, ANNABEL HART, CAMBODIAN CHILDREN'S FUND

*The Cambodian Children's Fund (CCF) provides housing and meals, as well as medical treatment and education to more than 300 children in Cambodia.*

**1.** There are three main criteria: skills/experience, commitment and vetting.

First, we prefer volunteers with specific skills or experience in key programme areas (for example health, education, childcare, social work) or in fundraising, marketing/communications or administration work.

Second, we generally require that volunteers stay three-six months minimum. It is better when people can make a strong commitment to our organisation and take the time to get to know the programmes, staff and children.

Third, we have recruitment guidelines as part of our Child Protection Policy requiring full vetting of volunteers including police/background checks and references. It is our duty of care responsibility to protect the children, whose best interests are our number one priority.

**2.** The greatest risks are associated with protecting the safety of the children, but we have sound measures in place to prevent this. The other risk is that volunteers do not work well with other staff and adapt to the organisation's needs.

**3.** We have had almost no problems! However, volunteers do need to show confidence and initiative, but also cultural sensitivity, respect and a willingness to pitch in and do whatever tasks are at hand.



ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR DR. BOUASAVANH KEOVIILAY, NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LAOS

*Dr Bouasavanh Keovilay is Vice Dean of the Faculty of Letters at the National University of Laos, an institution that receives approximately twenty international volunteers and 'expert' staff from around the world each year. The following interview was conducted by Hilary Smith, a former VSA volunteer who taught with Dr Keovilay twenty years ago.*

**1. What do you think about the idea that volunteer teachers are 'gap-filling' in positions which should be filled by local teachers?**

I think in our setting—the teaching of foreign languages—volunteers are of great importance in regard to the building of linguistic features competence for our staff and students. International staff [volunteers and paid staff] act as 'counterparts', 'advisors' and 'in-service trainers' at our institution, and their input in all capacities is very useful for our staff and faculty and for the university as a whole. Their input not only trains our staff to be skilful in their jobs, but also to develop a bank of education materials. Having the chance to learn from each other is a beneficial experience for both volunteers and local staff and is something we hope will continue and develop in the future.

**2. What are the differences between volunteers and other international staff? How important are these differences?**

In our situation, there are some differences between volunteers and experts (experts in this case refer to other international staff). Usually volunteers are required to teach and work with Lao counterparts in terms of preparing lesson plans and tests and marking stu-

dents' work. Experts, on the other hand, are expected to help us coordinate not only with their own organisation, but also with other universities, institutions and organisations for improving the quality of the teaching and learning, planning activities, training trainers, developing teaching materials, organising workshops and conferences and other required work from the faculty and university.

**3. In your setting, what is the 'perfect volunteer'?**

In my opinion, the character of volunteers and other international staff should be flexible, active, ready to learn from local people and more importantly (in our case) they should know how to forgive when necessary. This may be needed when misunderstandings occur during the actual work or the implementation of the project due to both parties being from a different culture. I think their motivations are also important because they are going to work with different types of people who may have different cultural, social and educational backgrounds.

I am certain that our faculty and university will continue to request volunteers in the future. (Interview conducted by *Hilary A Smith* an independent researcher based in Palmerston North. <http://www.systemetrics.co.nz>)

## Volunteers

1. Do you think volunteering contributes positively to development?
2. How has the volunteering experience contributed to your personal understanding of development?
3. What do you think is the most important thing for volunteer organisations to provide?



**Gayna Vetter** volunteered with Service Civil International (SCI) in Poland and West Germany in 1983 and spent four years as an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Trainer with Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) in Vanuatu and Tanzania.

**1.** I believe that in most cases the impact comes back with a returning volunteer to their country of origin and that this is as important as the impacts development refers to as being desirable in developing countries. This helps to change the thinking of 'developed' countries. There are many things we have done to be developed that haven't enhanced our lives. Therefore, our learning this and seeing that we can live simpler lives helps to narrow the gap between developed and developing in a different way. Instead of always focussing on eradicating extreme poverty, perhaps the idea of eradicating extreme wealth is worthwhile. So yes, I think volunteering contributes to development but in unexpected ways.

**2.** When I first started volunteering I wasn't thinking of development in the sense that I think of it now. I was aware there were disadvantaged people but I didn't focus on development as an issue or a process. And volunteering led me to where I am now. As I am writing this, I am back in Vanuatu, do-

ing research for a Masters of Development Studies. And living a simpler life back in New Zealand.

**3.** The volunteer sending organisation is a vital connection between the volunteer and foreign partner organisation. A main role they have is ensuring sustainability of development work and for this, integrity is needed. While the experience is a tremendous opportunity for growth for an individual doing volunteer work, it should not be their ticket to experience only. A volunteer should clearly understand what they are working towards and that the goal is to work themselves out of a job. To further support sustainability, the sending organisation should ensure the partner organisation understands volunteers are not only cheap labour.

Training and follow-up communications are necessary to remind the volunteer that they are still working in development and that they have the potential to do more harm than good if they don't look backwards and forwards to the footprints that have been left before and those they make toward the future.



**Tristan Rendall** volunteered for the Singapore International Foundation on a Youth Expedition Project, teaching English and helping in construction projects for a month in Yunnan, China.

**1.** Yes. It improves awareness of global issues and allows those with skills to contribute to countries in need. Volunteer organisations, in my opinion, benefit greatly from being locally owned and operated, as the overhead resources and requirements continue to benefit the local community.

**2.** Volunteering helped me understand the frustrations of bureaucracy, the importance of mundane things like the weather and the importance of local participation. During our project in Yunnan, we decided that the school would benefit from a set of stairs leading from the road to the school to minimise injuries. However, after consultation with the children and principal, we soon realised this wasn't an issue to them; all the children lived on farms and dealt with rocks and steep paths on a daily basis. What mattered more to them were new blackboards and better teaching materials.

**3.** Training. Everything else can be built once this foundation is in place. There is nothing worse than having an eager volunteer without any understanding of what is required from them. Our project was largely student-organised and funded. This meant we knew the funds went directly to the school and the decisions were those of the community and ourselves. Unfortunately, this also meant we received little in the way of formal TEFL (teaching English as a Foreign Language) training, so our lessons were often ad-libbed and may not have been as beneficial as they could have been in the long-term.



**Jenny Woodburn** is currently in Dhaka for eight months, volunteering as a Teacher Trainer with Society for Underprivileged Families (SUF) as part of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) programme.

**1.** I definitely believe that volunteering can contribute positively to development; it depends largely on how the work is undertaken (among other circumstances). I also believe it can contribute negatively. If volunteers are only housed in extremely 'rich' ex-patriot areas and don't engage with communities, it may contribute to the assumption that westerners are not able to understand issues associated with poverty or truly engage with those most affected by it.

For volunteering to contribute positively to development, it would involve volunteers communicating in the local language in order to understand the desires, plans and knowledge of local people. For me, the role of 'teacher trainer' was almost impossible because most teachers had little understanding

of English, the curricula were written in Bangla and there seemed to be a general expectation that I would just teach (as there was a shortage of teachers). Learning the language takes time, so volunteering for short periods of time across a range of different countries/cultures may run the risk of a volunteer applying a 'one size fits all' approach.

**2.** A major learning curve for me occurred pre-volunteering. At the information session and pre-departure training I learned about the aid 'industry' and how for many it is viewed as a potential career path. Volunteering gave me a greater appreciation for the fiscal side of development and the difficulties involved in administering and delivering programmes and realistically assessing their impact.

**3.** A welcoming environment and open communication with volunteers so the volunteer can be sure their presence has been requested by the organisation.

# Shifting together

International volunteers still have a role when they arrive back home. **SHONA JENNINGS** from Aotearoa New Zealand's Volunteer Service Abroad argues that volunteer programmes should focus on developing global citizenship.

**V**olunteer sending agencies generally focus on placing volunteers overseas for set assignments. However, poverty interventions in developing countries only solve part of the problem. Significant shifts have to be made by people in the 'North' if global development goals are to ever be realised, and volunteer agencies have a unique role to play by rethinking the volunteer's role within Aotearoa New Zealand.

In recent years, New Zealand's largest volunteer organisation, Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA), has moved from being a 'volunteer sending agency' (placing volunteers where they are needed) to a 'development agency' (working to a strategy with other development stakeholders to meet key development needs). The shift has required a different level of communication and engagement with stakeholders, including developing stronger, longer-term relationships, and a greater depth of analysis on the place of volunteering in development. It has led to a more strategic approach to supporting various levels of development 'in-country': working with governments to help them achieve their vision and working with civil society.

The diagram below, presented at the 2007 International Volunteer and Cooperation Organisation (IVCO) in Montreal, illustrates that this approach is also being taken by other volunteer organisations around the world. The circle sizes (depicting the degree of focus placed on the model) vary between organisations, depending on philosophical and resource issues. In VSA's case, the circle focus is still within the brown and blue spheres, but the overlaps suggest that everyone has a role

### Rationales for Volunteer Cooperation



to play in public engagement, no matter what 'oval' their other efforts are in.

This model synthesised discussions at VSA and led to an increased commitment to 'Personal Learning', which is about growing good global citizens. The model suggests that the value of volunteer organisations isn't just about what is put out in terms of sending people overseas to share skills, but what volunteers can put in to Aotearoa New Zealand upon their return. This helps ensure change is a global affair.

For the volunteer to play their role successfully there must be critical thinking. This can lead to heightened awareness of the issues and to personal analysis in the context of the volunteering experience. Conveying key messages from the lessons learned and advocating for change should follow. The volunteer sending agency's role in this is to assist volunteers with the tools to analyse what they witness and learn—before, during and after their assignment—and then to offer support (personal, logistical, and financial) to volunteers, using insights to lead change within their own lives and within their community. This puts another 'ask' upon volunteers, requiring them to commit to more than 'the assignment'. But if—as in VSA's case—the organisation's goal has to do with 'ending poverty and injustice', then this is a justifiable request.

One problem with this personal learning model is the difficulty in measuring the outcome. Yet, mobilising people towards global citizenship—awareness of economic, social and environmental issues and linkages, and



Volunteers have a role to play as catalysts for pro-development change within their own societies after their overseas volunteer experience. At the end of their nine-month assignment, VSA's UniVols commit to 'development education' work on their return to New Zealand. Pictured: VSA UniVol Miriam Wood was introduced to the volunteering ethos by her parents, who were VSA volunteers in the 80s. She is photographed with Leina Simon from Wan Smolbag Theatre, Vanuatu.

responding through appropriate action—is central to sustainable development.

At VSA, the intricacies of how we develop this personal learning model are still being teased out. But the commitment is there. VSA's mantra: 'New Zealanders making a positive difference in the world', goes beyond the sphere of the volunteer's work on assignment. Aotearoa New Zealand is part of the world, and volunteers can make a positive difference here too. It is more than creating change 'over there'. It is about shifting together—there, and here.

For further information, go to <http://www.vsa.org.nz>.



Community development adviser Frances Sullivan has spent two years living in the remote Dongobesh region of Tanzania. The trust and relationships she has built over this time have led to unique understandings of the issues and realities of life for people there. In turn, the people of Dongobesh have come to develop a better understanding of, and trust for, 'Westerners'.

# Volunteering in a neo-liberal development paradigm: A Timor-Leste case study

**NICHOLE GEORGEOU & BRENDAN JOYCE** from Palms Australia question the role volunteers play in AusAID policy in Timor Leste, pointing to a risky conflict between the aims of volunteering and those of the aid programmes in which volunteers work.

Since 1997, the neo-liberal ideology underpinning Australia's development aid policy has led to a focus on private contracting, as well as private business and institution building. While this has involved a move away from aid based on respect for independent communities, there has been a shift of attention to Australian volunteer sending programmes and the accompanying portrayal of cross-cultural volunteers as the human face and goodwill behind Australian development aid. Likewise, Australian cross-national volunteer sending programmes have also experienced a change in focus, moving



Palms Australia volunteer Louise Maher, with recent graduates of a Community Based Rehabilitation course at ASSERT, Dili, Timor-Leste



Palms Australia volunteers Cheree and Michael Flanagan with members of Ahisaun, Dili, Timor-Leste

away from traditional models which recognised the centrality of cross-cultural relationships in achieving development aims, to models which prioritise 'doing development'. In the latter model, cross-cultural relationship building is seen as an inevitable yet non-essential by-product of 'doing development'.

In identifying the shift in emphasis of volunteer sending models it is particularly important to acknowledge that the humanitarian based assumptions of 'development' work held by volunteers differ radically from those of the Australian government. During recent fieldwork in Timor-Leste, comments from both volunteers and NGO workers stressed that solidarity between people was central to development that made a real difference. The idea that living and working alongside the community is intrinsic to understanding their development needs and processes is also central to the discourse at the heart of participatory development models, currently in vogue with multi-lateral organisations such as the World Bank. However, while Australian volunteers' notions of effective development are based on empowerment models, in which local people organise themselves to identify and achieve their own means of alleviating poverty, the Australian government's ideals of development as reflected in AusAID policy are markedly different.

In contrast to the volunteers' humanitarian focus, AusAID policy reflects the neo-liberal

view of development as economic. Within this paradigm, there is an assumed relationship between development aid and economic growth whereby aid stimulates economic growth and reduces poverty. Failures to do so are attributed to failures in governance locally. The good governance focus has led to the conditionality of Australian aid that has created tensions between Australia and its aid recipients in the Asia Pacific, in particular the growing sense that Australia is increasingly meddling in domestic politics.

In both the 2003 foreign policy White Paper and the 2006 overseas aid White Paper, the repeated emphasis on 'Australia's national interest' demonstrates a willingness to use overseas aid to advance Australia's own regional and economic ambitions. In Timor-Leste, Australia's 'national interest' features prominently in AusAID funded programmes where there is a strong and explicit link between humanitarian aid and commercial advantage. Under the guise of 'good governance', the Australian government's campaign against FRETILIN and Alkatiri in particular can be viewed as connected to the Australian government's desire (since 1975) to control the Timor Gap oil and gas resources. Accusations that oil and gas, rather than humanitarian interests, are at the heart of Australia's intervention in Timor-Leste's politics were made more credible by the withdrawal of AusAID funding from Forum Tau Matan and other Timorese NGOs which protested the Timor Sea maritime 'agreements'.

More Australians than ever before are volunteering abroad, with the majority of Australian cross-national volunteers in placements in those Asia Pacific countries targeted by Australia's development aid programmes. It is important to consider how the Australian government's use of development assistance as a political tool has both security implications for volunteers and compromises their ability to build the relationships necessary for development. While Australia has contributed to immediate regional stability, the long-term effectiveness of current policy is tenuous. We urge the new Australian government to implement a shift back towards the relationship-centred models, favoured both by volunteers and overseas partners, which have a track record of achieving the mutually dependent outcomes of peace and development. This shift should involve honouring a core principle of the 2006 White Paper—the 'untying' of Australian aid.

*Nichole Georgeou is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences, Media and Communication at the University of Wollongong.*

*Brendan Joyce is the Assistant Director of Palms Australia, an independent Australian volunteering agency. For more information, go to <http://www.palms.org.au>.*



# Volunteering: What's in a name?

Relationships formed through volunteering are often complex and fraught. **LUCY HEALEY, JENNY BOULET AND JACQUES BOULET**, from the **Borderlands Cooperative** consider the reasons for this.

It has been *de rigueur* for some time now to acknowledge that volunteering means different things to different people. People's feelings about what volunteering means to them are undeniable; we hear people explain that they volunteer in order to 'give something back to society'. This is both intriguing and perplexing, for what was 'taken' that 'something was owed' in the first place? And to whom or what is that 'something' owed? We argue that the above 'explanation' or motivation for volunteering points to some fundamental, unexamined assumptions about the nature and status of volunteering, of work and of relationships in our society and in our culture.

Our experiences of working through Borderlands Cooperative with volunteering in a variety of contexts indicate to us that there is a need to re-validate what volunteering means in terms of 'relationships' (or again, more widely, in terms of human relating).

## Relationships through volunteering

Many of the relationships that volunteers enter into are fraught. There is often a failure to see the relationships of meaningful work—human activity or forms of 'mutually beneficial relating'—as actually creating society and sociality.

The notions of *primary sociality* (the sociality of personal relationships amongst family, friends, neighbours and beyond) and *secondary sociality* (the sociality relying on defined status and job positions within institutions of the market and the state), as discussed by Godbout and Caillé, are helpful in teasing

out what can make relationships so fraught in volunteering. In effect, the typologies of voluntary activity and the institutional context within which the activity occurs—sliding from 'private' to 'mixed' to 'public'—manifest both primary and secondary sociality. But the balance is tipping increasingly towards the sociality of the market and the state, and away from the sociality of personal relationships forged through family, neighbours and local community.

To illustrate, we have heard volunteers and sometimes managers and coordinators of volunteers complain about increased *bureaucratisation* in managing services to 'the community' delivered by volunteers. However, the desire for good relationships of sociality to be nurtured and developed between the

**where voluntary activity is measured against the yardstick of paid work, this is precisely where it becomes so difficult for 'real' relationships of duration and depth to stay alive**

'customers' (or 'clients' of the service), the volunteers, and the managers of volunteers is also recognised. We see busy managers with scant resources endeavouring to ensure the safety of 'their clients' as well as 'their volunteers', drowning in paperwork in order to be accountable to their executives and funding bodies while also trying to achieve benchmarks set by an increasingly professionalised peak volunteering body. They strive for 'good relationships' but it is not always easy when they are strapped for time. We see volunteers, for their part, who enjoy the sociality and company of those they 'serve' and work alongside, but they, too, often come to simply focus on 'getting the job done' in the face of an overly bureaucratised and outcome-focused institutional setting within which they work.

Even many forms of 'development volunteering' have destroyed that 'network of in-

terpersonal relations consolidated by the gift and mutual aid' that Godbout and Caillé write of. We have seen volunteers come into village communities to engage in 'community development', work that collapses once the volunteers have left. In these communities, such work might have been undertaken voluntarily by households and kin groups, but once such work becomes organised from officially recognised development agencies outside the community and thus 'specialised', it commonly kills off the relationships of a community nature (the private relationships of kinship and community or of primary sociality).

Even in the best possible working environments, bureaucratisation can make the relationships between volunteers, manager and volunteer, and the volunteer and the people they work with, or 'serve', fraught. Bureaucratisation inherently diminishes the importance of primary sociality by privileging secondary sociality (and the formalised 'accountabilities' associated with it, see Ebrahim and Weisband) and thus diminishes the capacity for enduring reciprocal relationships to form. It inculcates 'wrong' values associated with paid work into the values of the volunteering relationship, 'polluting' the value of proper gift-giving and mutual aid upon which primary sociality is built; it diminishes reciprocity so that learning through new relationships is made so much more difficult. And, it rigidifies the categories of 'giver' and 'receiver' (how many times have we heard that a person with a disability 'receives' the help or service of another person who does not have a disability?) instead of accepting that true gift-giving means entering into a relationship of reciprocity, however deferred that may be.

What, then, comes of the substance and value of 'real' relationships, in terms of duration, reciprocity and sacrifice, the characteristics discussed by Papilloud? We suggest that where voluntary activity is measured against the yardstick of paid work, this is precisely where it becomes so difficult for 'real' relationships of duration and depth to stay alive. Surely, a better *economy* is one that accepts a basic human *ecology* of survival, one that is predicated on sustaining human relationships of mutual aid and reciprocity. There's really quite a lot to the name of volunteering.

*Lucy Healey, Jenny Boulet and Jacques Boulet are researchers with the Borderlands Cooperative in Melbourne; they have worked together and individually as volunteers, with volunteers and 'on' volunteering in many contexts. For further information, go to <http://www.borderlands.org.au>.*

# Red Cross Volunteering for humanity

AMANDA SCOTHERN from the Red Cross looks at the contribution of volunteers in Timor Leste to the Red Cross's image and political position.

**V**oluntary Service is one of the seven Fundamental Principles that guides the work of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement globally.

The Red Cross Movement, born in 1859, includes the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Today, there are 186 National Societies around the world, and the lifeblood of these organisations is their millions of volunteers. I began working for the Red Cross in September 2007, posted to work with one of the newest National Societies, Cruz Vermelha de Timor Leste (CVTL), in this recently independent nation.

The presence of the Red Cross Movement in Timor Leste spans decades, from the institution of the Portuguese Red Cross active under Portuguese colonisation until 1975, then the Indonesian national society (PMI), and an ICRC presence that continues until the present day. CVTL became the 183rd member of the IFRC in November 2005. Though the institution has changed over the decades, the presence of the Red Cross as a force for the promotion and modelling of humanitarian principles and practice has remained



Volunteers completing first aid training



A landslide that is the kind of natural disaster that CVTL (Timor Leste Red Cross) works to assist people prepare for and cope with. These photos were all taken in Timor Leste by a professional in 2007 - thanks to support from the Australian RC.

constant, and many volunteers and staff of today's CVTL have been part of the movement since before Timor Leste's independence.

Juliao is one of the newer generation of CVTL volunteers. After hearing about the work of the Red Cross through community radio, he approached his local district office in Viqueque to become a volunteer. This was 2003, the early days of the nascent CVTL and Juliao was a Senior High School student. He completed First Aid, then HIV/AIDS training provided with the help of experienced trainers from the Indonesian PMI, though was unsuccessful qualifying as a trainer of trainers for these two courses. But he tells how he 'wasn't so interested in [his] studies, but very interested in Red Cross' and was an active leader of other young volunteers in his district. He persisted, and in 2005 completed the CBFA (community-based health) training to national level and this time qualified as a Trainer of Trainers.

When violence broke out in Timor Leste again in April 2006, Juliao was one of the First Aid volunteers who stayed in Dili to be on call to attend to the wounded, dead and vulnerable. 'We provided First Aid to people who had been injured in the shooting, then the next week I helped deliver emergency food and water to the IDPs [internally displaced people] who had fled their homes.' Juliao tells of travelling with the Red Cross ambulance through the checkpoints of various armed groups in order to collect the bodies of those killed in the fighting and take them to hospital:

*No one else could go...they were afraid of being shot by one or the other side. There were grenades all over the road, and I was afraid, but it's an emergency and you can't be afraid, we were just thinking how to help and take people to hospital.*

His family in the district feared for him. They said, 'all the government workers are

not working, so why is the Red Cross office still working?' Juliao told them 'Red Cross is here for the crisis time - that is what we do!'

Juliao is now a Red Cross employee and helps coordinate training and health service provision activities for the growing number of CVTL volunteers throughout the country.

As I travel with my colleagues around Timor Leste in a vehicle bearing the CVTL logo with its Red Cross symbol, children in the towns and villages we pass, wave and shout Palang Merah or Cruz Vermelha as we drive through. Palang Merah is Indonesian for Red Cross, and Cruz Vermelha the name (in Portuguese) of Timor Leste's National Society. In a changing political climate, the Red Cross/Red Crescent has maintained its presence in communities, its neutrality and its humanitarian focus through its volunteers. People in villages and towns all over this country recognise and respect the Red Cross for its humanitarian role.

Over the course of the last eight years as I have worked in Gaza, Liberia, Solomon Islands and with people from refugee backgrounds in Aotearoa New Zealand, I have listened to many stories and had some experience of the terrible inhumanities that are part of violent conflicts. I have also learned that often the thing that sustains people through the worst experiences and provides the single seed that allows trust and hope to grow back can be a simple act of humanity in the midst of inhumanity.

For me, the work of Red Cross volunteers is an essential 'light in the dark', building values, norms, skills and knowledge in times of peace and calm that in times of crisis translate into the acts of humanity that change lives.

*Amanda Scothern is an Organisational Development Delegate with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) working with the Timor Leste Red Cross, based in Dili, Timor Leste.*

# Volunteering and the ethics of cyber-space

**RAQUEL DIAS, a journalist and volunteer at Convergdencia in Brazil, considers the rise of virtual volunteering.**

New forms of social interaction and action have developed through the emergence of new technology. This article looks at some of the new forms, specifically related to the volunteer sector.

Volunteering can be defined as an activity involving people who offer their skills and time, out of their own free will, to individual projects or society at large. They do it in a variety of ways, aiming to have a positive impact on the community or environment. It is a way people from all parts the world can join together to use their talents, knowledge and time to do something for the present and for the future.

Nowadays, companies are unable to ignore the rapid change and connections created by the Internet and new technology and have had to change their way of thinking and working as a result. NGOs have similarly had to adapt; the volunteer sector being no exception to this. As a sector it has undergone changes and new forms of community service and mutual help have emerged. Cyber-volunteering is

## Cyber-volunteering is one such form, involving individuals with ICT skills in both online and onsite activities and action.

one such form, involving individuals with ICT skills in both online and onsite activities and action. It provides new ways to promote an organisation's values and messages, with potentially very high coverage, giving more people the opportunity to get involved in actions that they consider worthy regardless of their physical location.

With the idea of progress comes the responsibility of making sure the initial message of the organisation remains alive, independent of the technology. In this case, the web has to be a tool, a catalyst for cooperation. An example is ICVolunteers (www.icvolunteers.org), 'an international non-profit organization specialized in the field of communications, in particular cybervolunteering, languages and conference support'. The Executive Director of this institution, Viola Krebs, explains that 'individuals involved in



the CyberVolunteers Program offer their information and communication technology skills to development-related projects.' Krebs adds, 'by offering their skills, they learn new things, build their network of social connections, increase their awareness and might well be in a position to further their chances of finding employment.' Thus, volunteering gives people the opportunity to develop and improve themselves whilst helping others.

According to the President and Institutional Coordinator of the Brazilian NGO, Convergdencia (www.convergdencia.org.br) and ICV Desk Brasil, Renata Moraes, people have some wrong perceptions about volunteerism. Peoples motivations are often not as you would expect. They often volunteer to fill a space in their life. They also have found that many young people without any experience who have the time and no money worries may opt to become a volunteer so they can acquire some experience. With these motivations, there tends to be little commitment and actions are short lived.

Cybervolunteering is very new in Brazil and often occurs without people knowing it exists or that it has a name. It can take on many forms including creating websites, sending emails, working on projects or even lending others their computers for work.

With regards to the opportunities this provides for corporate volunteering, NGOs cannot function in a vacuum and it is therefore important that companies get involved and engage with them. Of course, in some cases, companies' motives for creating partnerships with NGOs are to put their own brands in the spotlight, another way to promote themselves.

Successful Brazilian companies have traditionally started their own Foundation or Institution as a way of dealing with social and environment dilemmas. Another way is to use NGOs to solve their problems with communities and society in general. When there



Volunteers at Viva Verde or 'Live Green'

is no conflict or pressure from government it is very rare to find a collaboration between NGOs and enterprises. As support for socio-environmental issues grows, companies are increasingly open to debate on these issues and so opportunity for collaboration is increasing. Therefore, it is essential that NGOs maintain a strong position and do not compromise or forget their beliefs and principles under the influence of this kind of market driven positioning.

When wanting to get involved as a volunteer, it is important to look for meaningful institutions engaged in serious projects. Then candidates can visit these organisations, get to know the people involved and engage in their activities. Each institution has a particular focus, implementing specific kinds of activities. ICV's cyber-volunteers (www.cybervolunteers.info), for example, typically 'participate in local, regional and international projects ... offering their skills in areas such as web or software development, system administration and content generation'.

Being a cyber-volunteer requires more than just time and technical know-how: indeed, it is all about having the willingness and determination to make a difference by sharing skills and knowledge. In order to see our planet move in the right direction, we need to become actors rather than being passive spectators and cyber volunteering is providing new opportunities and arenas in which we can do this.

*This article was written with cooperation from Renata Moraes, Convergdencia ICV Desk Brasil, Viola Krebs, ICVolunteers, Carlos Accioly, a Convergdencia volunteer and Patricia Mantovani from Vale's interprise.*

# Christian volunteering: Feeding the hungry, saving souls

Combining personal experience and analysis, SHARON MCLENNAN investigates the basis of religiously motivated volunteering.

Growing up in an evangelical protestant home, my early exposure to volunteer service was largely in the form of 'missions'. 'Go into the world and preach the gospel' was the resounding message, and I did just that. My first overseas trip was with a mission group to Latin America. I watched and cheered as friends carried bibles across borders, and preached and prayed their way through Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. My twenties were a blur of saving hard at home and travelling the world as a volunteer nurse with a Christian-based medical relief organisation.

However, the more I travelled and experienced the world, the more disquiet I felt. I began to question the impacts of 'Christian missions' as well as the overall role of westerners in development. This unease led me to development studies—first just a couple of papers, then a Masters degree and now a PhD. While the ability of academic study to provide definitive answers is debatable, the study has given me the opportunity to reflect on my earlier experiences and the role Christian missions play in community service and development.

My experience is not unusual. It is well-known and accepted that Church members are more likely to volunteer than non-religious individuals and that religious beliefs can influence the meaning of volunteering

**It is well-known and accepted that Church members are more likely to volunteer than non-religious individuals and that religious beliefs can influence the meaning of volunteering in people's lives.**

in people's lives. The bible explicitly instructs Christians to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and visit the sick, and Churches often formally encourage civic action in communities during sermons, homilies, teachings, or prayers. Church-based friendship networks informally encourage volunteering by cultivating skills that are transferable to civic efforts outside of congregations.

While there is a strong link between Church attendance and volunteering, denominations vary significantly in the amount and type of volunteering undertaken by members. For example, studies have shown that Protestants



An elderly woman shows her appreciation for a pair of glasses given by a medical mission team.

Inset: Not just physical but spiritual care. During an evangelical medical mission a nurse gives a presentation that draws parallels between basic hygiene and spiritual health.

are more likely than Catholics or people with no religious affiliation to be involved in charitable and other social service activities.

These differences are strongly related to underlying theological beliefs. Catholicism comes closest to the stereotyped connection between religiosity and good works through its traditions of social teaching that focus on caring for the less fortunate and addressing inequalities.

Mainline Protestantism draws primarily from early twentieth century social gospel that stresses societal reform to reflect core principles of love, peace, and justice. These principles are expressed in two main ways: Liberal denominations (for example Presbyterian, Anglican) are associated with 'social activism' and frequently support community development and programmes for battered women, abused children, pregnant teenagers, migrants or refugees. Conservative and evangelical Protestants give priority to evangelism, driven by a profound belief within the Church that those who do not 'accept Christ' will not enter heaven. They are taught to interpret biblical teachings on charity in highly spiritual terms, and generally focus on personal salvation rather than collective action to benefit the broader community. 'Saving souls' in this context is perceived as a compassionate endeavour and social and community service is therefore a means to that end.

The evangelical approach has led to much controversy both within Christian circles and in the wider community due to the obvious ethi-

cal and moral dilemmas it creates, particularly when power and resource issues are at stake.

Hoge, Perry and Klever, note that there is 'a significant and negative relationship between beliefs in scriptural authority... and social action.' Participation in mainline Protestant and Catholic congregations seems to facilitate involvement in organisations that serve the needs of those in the larger community in a way that participation in evangelical Protestant congregations generally does not. This does not rule out volunteering for more conservative Protestants, but simply suggests that their volunteer work will be concerned more with the maintenance of their church as a spiritual community and with outreach to non-believers.

However, while clear trends between Christian denominations can be discerned, the decision to volunteer may be based on personal conviction and family and social circumstances as much as spiritual tradition. My roots are evangelical, but my choice of a non-denominational, medically oriented organisation was as much a reflection of my own beliefs, preferences and personal situation, as it was the spiritual tradition in which I grew up.

*Sharon McLennan is a registered nurse and has just commenced a PhD in Development Studies at Massey University. For this article she draws on personal experience and her Masters research looking at the role of Medical volunteers.*

# Reconstructing Livelihoods:

## The importance of local ownership in volunteer projects

Based on his own experience in post-tsunami Thailand, **TRISTAN RENDALL**, an Honours student in International Relations at the University of Sydney, considers the implications of local ownership.

'This is Thailand; it is their country, their community and their lives.'

*Hi Phi Phi, 2005.*

The Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 saw unprecedented levels of donations from nearby countries, NGOs and individual citizens to those affected by the crisis. Donations were largely monetary, but for those wanting to participate in the recovery process, the choices were immense. Regular companies continued to offer commercial voluntourism packages, NGOs engaged their regular agencies, and for the backpackers and others wanting to give, grassroots organisations such as Hi Phi Phi were established. Over 2,000 volunteers from dozens of countries were brought together through backpacker grapevines to donate their time and skills. This success can be attributed to the high levels of local ownership and participation adopted by Hi Phi Phi.

The main tourist area on Phi Phi Don in the Phi Phi Islands is located on an isthmus; a narrow strip of land between two steep limestone ridges. This picture-postcard location draws tourists, but unfortunately, these same features meant it was almost completely destroyed by the tsunami, which approached from both sides destroying 70% of all buildings and killed 4,000 people.

Local participation was at the forefront of many of our minds throughout our time on Ko Phi Phi. Many of us had arrived specifically to distance ourselves from corporate voluntourism projects and wanted to give back to the community in a direct, measurable way.



Working on October Guesthouse on Ko Phi Phi required the coordination of many volunteers

There was active engagement with the local population in the form of a 'steering committee' that vetted potential projects based on need, the person's financial circumstance and whether success was achievable. Many of the members of this committee had been employed on the island prior to the tsunami and so had strong community connections. Such a plan, I believe, is only feasible on a small scale such as this, and Ko Phi Phi's isolated location and small population helped keep it largely removed from the highly structured efforts on Phuket and the mainland.

As with any situation with more use for funds than there are available finances, there were challenges, but the priority always remained with families and their livelihoods. The two largest challenges remained the reli-

ance on honesty and the transient nature of many of the volunteers and their skill-base. Amongst the volunteers, there existed an unspoken rule which banned bargaining for goods. It was thought to be disrespectful given the circumstances. The transient nature of the volunteers' skill-base was harder to overcome and led to some projects being delayed until the required skills arrived.

Despite the transient workforce, guesthouses could be built and open for customers within two weeks. During my stay, two guesthouses opened and the most popular bakery was due to open a second branch soon after I left.

Through local participation and ownership, Hi Phi Phi earned the trust and respect of Phi Phi residents and brought tourists, income and livelihoods back to the devastated island.



Before the rebuilding of Jong's Guesthouse



Jong's Guesthouse, after the work had been completed



A parents support session organised by Sudanese Children in Need

## Refugee women as volunteers: Resisting marginality and exclusion

Turning the economic and social stereotype of a volunteer on its head, **FRANCES TOMLINSON**, a Senior Lecturer at London Metropolitan University, describes the motivations and rewards experienced by volunteers from the refugee community in London.

*The reason was to get out of the house, to do something...I didn't even have a telly so you just sit there and do a bit of reading if you get a book from the charity shop...I just wanted to feel like I was doing something...I was getting so, so lonely.*

*It was out of my gratitude for the help that they [organisation] gave me when I came here as a refugee. So I wanted to give something back so this is why I offered to help in that day centre.*

*I can always help...because I feel if the people can't express themselves, it's really bad because I passed that situation in 1992 I know...how it was hard.*

In these quotes three refugee women explain their different reasons for becoming volunteers. The quotes are drawn from a study that documented the volunteering experience of 52 refugee women in London. This level of participation challenges the negative representation of refugees as a burden on the economy and as the recipients of social welfare. It also brings into question some commonly held assumptions about volunteers—who they are, what they do and why they do it.

According to Rebecca Taylor, volunteering in the UK has historically been understood as a middle class activity that is primarily concerned with 'doing good' for others. However the accounts of refugee women reveal that there are many different ways to be a volunteer. Some of these activities may be described as 'informal' volunteering or mutual

support—often involving interpreting and explaining to other refugees how things are done in the UK. Refugee community organisations—set up and run by refugees themselves and usually serving particular ethnic, national or cultural communities—provide a vital source of self-help and mutual support for refugees.

A focus on volunteering as essentially altruistic tends to marginalise self-help and mutual support. However the wide range of activities in which refugee women are involved—including counselling, advice and guidance giving, teaching and training, fundraising, financial management, organising and campaigning—shows that they are not confined to supportive or administrative roles,

**A focus on volunteering as essentially altruistic tends to marginalise self-help and mutual support.**

and that volunteering in community organisations comprises much more than a narrow range of self-help activities. Moreover, refugee women are often simultaneously engaged in different types of volunteering in several organisations, including 'mainstream' voluntary organisations and other forms of civic engagement, as well as those catering specifically for refugees. Although most refugees come from developing countries—countries that are usually thought of as the recipients rather than the givers of aid—it is not necessarily the case that they have no tradition of voluntary work. Thus their volunteering can be seen as continuing and building on experience from their country of origin.

Depicting volunteering as essentially altruistic reinforces the perception that it is an activity particularly suitable for women who are not in need of paid employment, but who have time on their hands. The situation

of refugee women, however, is very different. Firstly, in the UK, those who are classed as 'asylum seekers' are not legally permitted to undertake paid work. Secondly, levels of unemployment are generally high amongst refugees. This reflects the fact that employers are often suspicious of them and very reluctant to recognise their experience and qualifications gained overseas. Volunteering thus becomes their only means of participating in the world of work, and refugees are encouraged to become volunteers in order to gain UK work experience and to improve their language skills.

In contrast to the middle class volunteer, who participates in order to 'help others', the participation of marginalised groups such as refugees is principally explained in terms of how they benefit, assuming that their motivation is primarily instrumental. However, for many refugee women there is no clear distinction between altruistic and instrumental volunteering. A refugee from Kosovo described how others from her country could not believe that she worked so hard to help them without getting paid for it. She then went on to explain the benefits she had gained from the experience:

*They saw my English went quite fast compared with them...we started at the same level so then my English improved quite fast and my communication skills improved as well.*

The reasons that refugee women give for volunteering reflect their experience of exclusion, pain and isolation. Their participation as volunteers helps them to feel more empowered, self-confident and involved. It also demonstrates the important contribution they are making to shape and improve their 'host' society—a contribution that unfortunately is largely unrecognised and unvalued.



Khadiga at a parents support session organised by Sudanese Children in Need

# Catching the wave of corporate volunteering



Canadian corporate leaders and volunteers get playful in Toronto  
Photo: Barnaby Jeans (<http://barnabyjeans.ca>)

**Corporate volunteering is on the rise.**

**KATHRYN PATON, a Masters student in Development Studies and Senior Policy Analyst at the Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector examines its potential and its possible pitfalls.**

In a flicker of an eye, the corporation sweeps the village off its feet. Its employees build the village a lab to house the community's first computers. They install the computers, talk with the locals, give them a few lessons and they are gone again.

As I sat listening to this story and looking at photos projected onto the screen, my heart went on a roller-coaster ride. Through the corporation's volunteers the village gained a resource that previously seemed unobtainable, and the volunteers had an experience that broadened their understanding of the world. Then again, was a computer lab a priority in the village? Who has the skills and resources to maintain it in the future? Who will benefit most in the long-term—the village or the corporate? Does that matter?

Globally, corporate volunteering is growing, with more than 90% of Fortune 500 companies running such programmes. The launch of a Global Corporate Volunteer Council within the International Association for Voluntary Effort marks a significant step in the movement's growth.

Corporate volunteering (or employee volunteering) describes a continuum of employer support for the voluntary activities of their employees, from supporting their staff's private out-of-work activities, to group ac-

tivities integrated into the workplace. At its best, corporate volunteering can represent a 'triple win'—a win for corporations, employees and communities. This can be achieved by moving away from 'cheque book charity' toward corporations investing employee skills, time and resources in communities, in collaboration with local people. It is said to be one way in which businesses can be more socially responsible and consequently, better corporate citizens.

From a business perspective, the ultimate philosophy behind Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a belief that the social, not just the economic well-being of society is vital for business success. Poor communities make poor markets and poor employees—so creating stronger communities has commercial benefit.

The reality is that corporate volunteering is not, and never will be, simply about giving for the betterment of society. Employee volunteering brings companies tangible benefits, including improving their image both externally and internally. Many corporations are under permanent public scrutiny, and activities such as corporate volunteering are no longer discretionary. Customers, employees and civil society groups demand a higher level of social conscience and accountability. Those that succeed on this level may secure competitive advantage for expansion. This is especially so in parts of the developing world where longstanding social contracts exist,

which mean businesses have social obligations to employees and the wider society.

Corporate volunteering can also increase employee recruitment, retention, and morale. It can give otherwise very busy employees a chance to contribute to an issue they care about, broaden their horizons and their understanding of the world around them, develop or enhance their skills (including their leadership skills) and encourage them to feel good about the company they work with.

Great things can also be achieved from the community perspective. In addition to increasing access to resources and expertise, corporate volunteering can create opportunities for volunteers to learn about an organisation's cause. As anecdotal evidence tells us, volunteers talking positively about a project or cause can be a great form of publicity.

Yet, there are associated risks. Corporate volunteering that is not linked to stakeholder dialogue and engagement can lead to disaster. Power relations and naivety come into play, especially if corporate volunteering takes place in an atmosphere of 'charity' where there is an expectation that the receiver will be grateful for the act, any act. In this case volunteers can become a burden for receiving organisations who must prepare for them, or who may be afraid to say that the job volunteers are offering to do is not a priority. Corporations may also have underlying assumptions that they know best, when really the 'corporate way' may not work in the new environment.

Some people argue that there is a risk that corporate volunteering may be used by companies to 'buy social credit' against which anti-social behaviour can be off-set. But will consumers, communities and activists allow the wool to be pulled over their eyes? There is a body of evidence that shows for

corporate volunteering to be successful, it is important that the associated values and ethics penetrate all aspects of a corporation's work.

In the world of development the challenges are too big and the resources are too scarce to be deterred from corporate volunteering because of the associated risks. Solutions lie in communities and corporations going into employee volunteering relationships with a clear understanding of each other's expectations and needs. Tools and initiatives have been developed to assist in making these relationships work; for example, the ENGAGE campaign aims to increase the quality and extent of employee engagement in communities.

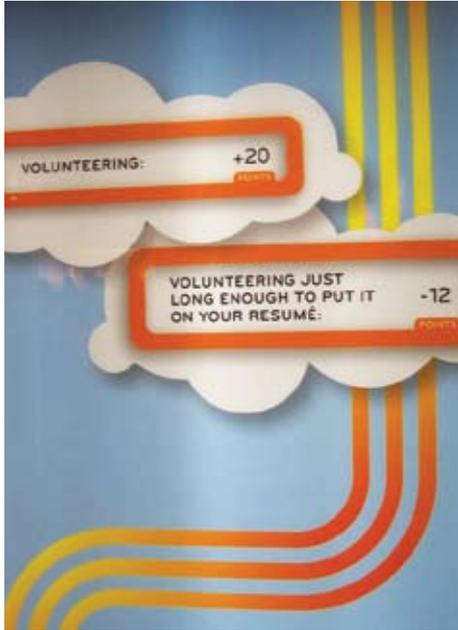
The success of corporate volunteering lies in not just doing it, but doing it well. Solutions to global issues will only be found when all sectors work together and collaborate.

**The reality is that corporate volunteering is not, and never will be, simply about giving for the betterment of society.**

# Do motives matter for volunteering?

## Coming to grips with the 'Selfish Volunteer'

CHRIS RODGERS, a Masters student at Victoria University, ponders whether the rise of the 'selfish volunteer' is a cause for concern.



Roadmap Photo: Rich Magahiz

A recent UK study cites the rise of the 'selfish volunteer' as one of the major contemporary developments in volunteering. The selfish volunteer is someone who volunteers primarily in order to get something out of the experience. They may wish to advance their skills, enhance their CV, have an adventure, or simply make themselves feel better by doing something 'good'. This development diverges significantly from the traditional understanding of volunteering as an altruistic act. The report argues that organisations need to come to terms with the selfish volunteer in order to recruit and retain the modern volunteer.

The emergence of the selfish volunteer presents a problem for the voluntary sector. It challenges our traditional understanding of volunteering as an essentially 'good' thing to do. However, if we fail to integrate the selfish volunteer and if this type of volunteer is increasing, we may be denying voluntary organisations an effective means to benefit the community.

Wellington ESOL home tutors is one organisation that has started to adapt to the selfish volunteer. They offer free training for a

qualification in English tutoring in exchange for at least six month's worth of volunteer work as an English tutor for refugees and migrants. Some who do volunteer thus do so primarily in order to gain the qualification, which can improve their chances of teaching English overseas. This appeal to self-interest shows the organisational shift necessary for those organisations that rely on volunteers to be effective.

This approach does not fully reconcile the selfish volunteer with our traditional understandings of volunteering as 'doing good'; to do this we must appreciate that we make different judgements about the individual and the act. When most of us say that there is something wrong with volunteering for self-interested reasons, we are really saying there is something wrong with the person as opposed to what the person is actually doing. Understanding our intuitive objection to the selfish volunteer in this way means that we can still view the selfish volunteer as someone doing a good thing and thus be able to accommodate them within voluntary organisations without reservation or negative consequence.

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# Enabling integration

## Building social capital through volunteering

RUTH HUBSCHER from ESOL Home Tutors

reflects on the contribution ESOL volunteers make to the social capital of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In an age when even the optimist Robert Putnam has acknowledged the potential for increased ethnic diversity to reduce social capital—levels of trust, political participation and happiness between and within ethnic groups—the value of volunteers in cross-cultural settings is apparent. The work of volunteers builds bridges of respect and understanding between individuals from different backgrounds as well as links between newcomers and the institutions opening doors to their social and economic development.

ESOL Home Tutors is one organisation that aims, through English language tutoring, to build bridges between ethnic groups in Aotearoa New Zealand and build a tolerant and more understanding society. The community based organisation, found in 23 towns and cities across Aotearoa New Zealand, provides English language tutoring in the learner's home, teaching the learner the language they need to know for their day-to-day survival.



ESOL-literacy tutor Jill Collinson (left) and Bosteyo Farrah from ESOL Home Tutors (West Auckland)

Each year the organisation trains and matches over 3000 volunteers who tutor and support the resettlement of 6000 adult refugees and migrants. Where the number of potential learners exceeds the numbers of volunteers available, services are prioritised to the most disadvantaged, whether they are isolated mothers with young children, the elderly, pre-literate refugees or people without the means or time to attend formal classes.

The value of volunteering however is much greater than an academic abstract. Trained

**The training provides volunteers with the skills and approach necessary for English language tutoring, but they use their own local knowledge and expertise to inform their practice.**

volunteers use their knowledge of their own community to assist their learner with their settlement and English language development. They assist their learner to navigate their way around their new community, whether it is the protocols and language to speak to their child's teacher about their child's progress at school, knowing where and how to catch the bus, or preparing for a job interview. The training provides volunteers with the skills and approach necessary for English language tutoring, but they use their own local knowledge and expertise to inform their practice.

Trained volunteers gain new skills, insights and understanding, which opens a whole new world to them. Long time tutor Christine Munro comments, 'Our lives are made richer by sharing ideas and stories and food and laughter ... It's a kind of travelling.' Volunteers may be matched with learners with different religious backgrounds, values or norms. It may challenge their preconceptions and world view, yet it will also build a greater understanding of the things everyone holds in common. As the volunteers discover more about the people they work with, they share that with others, creating a domino educational effect, challenging perceptions and helping people to understand other cultures.

For learners with the organisation, the benefit of building a close and trusting relationship with a trained volunteer is immeasurable. Mar Mar Kyi Maung, a learner with



Fumiko Shiraishi, ESOL Home Tutors (North Shore) and Deana Leonard greet each other at Awataha Marae during Adult Learners' Week 2007

the Nelson scheme says of the time she spent with her volunteer tutor, 'I learnt so much more than language skills. There were many cultural and day-to-day things you could not learn from a book or even in a classroom. It was the key to getting qualifications and a job.'

Former learners have gone on to contribute to society in numerous ways, whether through voluntary work—some eventually return to the organisation as voluntary home tutors—paid employment, parenting or grandparenting or developing their own business. The support of a volunteer is often one aspect of the base on which migrants and refugees are able to launch themselves in their new homeland and feel that they have the ability and the right to participate in and shape their new society.

Volunteers with ESOL Home Tutors enter a partnership with their learner and both members of the partnership have expertise and experiences to share and develop. The organisation brings together people that might otherwise never have the opportunity to meet and provides a mechanism, through language, for them to learn together. Both volunteer and learner are enriched by the experience yet the impact of the relationship is far greater. As the society and culture of Aotearoa New Zealand continues to change and develop, volunteers with ESOL Home Tutors play a fundamental role to ensure it continues to be welcoming and inclusive.

**Ruth Hubscher** is Operations Coordinator for the National Association of ESOL Home Tutor Schemes, <http://www.esolht.org.nz>.

# So you want to volunteer overseas?

## How to navigate your way through the ethical minefield

### 1. Research possible placements

The following criteria can be used to judge potential placements.

- Organisations offering volunteer opportunities should present the people they work with in a positive way, and should not present you, the volunteer, as their saviour
- Development, rather than tourism, profit, or the volunteer's pleasure, should be the organisation's central concern
- Community members should determine the project's direction
- The organisation should be discerning with its volunteer selection, making sure the volunteer's skills will be of use
- Figure out where any money you pay goes – anything above the cost of food, accommodation, and your administration should go to the project, and not the organisation that arranged the placement.

You could also find a placement once you arrive in a place where you would like to live. To find out about places that take on volunteers, try looking in guidebooks, asking at the council chambers, schools, and hostels. Be ready to accept that some places don't want or need volunteers.

### 3. Be a useful member of the community

Go as a student rather than a teacher. As a foreigner your presence may be unsettling to the community. Don't rock the boat or challenge cultural norms and dress appropriately. Do not flaunt your wealth. Do not make promises you can't keep or take part in political activities that could put others at risk. Do not engage in illegal activities or inappropriate relationships. Remember that your behavior has far-reaching repercussions, and can affect how people view your project, development workers, and foreigners.

### 2. Prepare for your placement

Learn the language, either in your home country, or by attending a language school prior to beginning your placement.

Learn more about where you are going. Learning as much as you can about the history, politics and culture will make it easier to adjust on your arrival. Learn what is culturally appropriate and modify your behaviour accordingly. Be aware of any subjects that may not be appropriate to bring up in conversation until you know people and the culture better.

Learn more about development. The challenges that face the community

### 4. Be a useful worker

Try to go for a good amount of time. Having volunteers coming and going is unsettling for your co-workers and others involved.

Don't expect too much. Few organisations will be in a position to pay for your living costs. Training and supervising volunteers takes up valuable time and energy, and money paid by volunteers can go towards keeping the project going. That said, beware of those organisations that charge an unreasonable amount to line their own pockets.

Be flexible. The role you agree to may well change if you or your co-workers discern a more suitable or urgent one.

Be professional. The fact that you are not getting paid shouldn't affect how you act at work.

Be honest about what you are capable of doing, and ask for help from co-workers or other locals when you need it.

Make sure the project knows in advance your leaving plans. Try to leave at an appropriate time – if you are a teacher, for example, try to leave at the end of term. Before you go, document your experiences so that the knowledge and insights you have gathered will not be lost.

you work in are often the result of global processes and the interaction between the developed and developing world. This information will inform and provide a wider context for your work.

Prepare yourself for your placement. Ask for a job description and look at what skills you need to work on before you start your placement. See if there is anything useful and appropriate you could bring to the project from the city or from home.

### 5. Stay committed

On leaving your organisation, you could continue to help out, through completing tasks via the Internet such as translation, or by providing advice for new volunteers. On return to your home country educate others about what you saw in your experiences.

### 6. Look after yourself

Organise your visas, your finances, your travel insurance and vaccinations. Be prepared for culture shock so you don't feel overwhelmed by its effects and for ideas on how to adjust. Don't take refuge in immersing yourself with other foreigners and complaining about the locals. Instead accept that there are other ways of communicating and of doing things, and that the sooner you stop judging, the easier life will get. Continue learning: participate in community life to have a good time and make your volunteer experience more valuable. And on your return prepare yourself for reverse culture shock, or re-entry-syndrome.

*This article contains some of the information that can be found in Dev-Zone's 'Volunteering overseas in development: A guide for Aotearoa New Zealanders' which can be found in the Dev-Zone Online Knowledge Centre.*

#### RESOURCES FROM THE DEV-ZONE LIBRARY

HE RAUEMI MAI | TE KOHINGA A DEV-ZONE

**The Hospice: Life 4** London: *Television Trust for the Environment (TVE), 2004. DVD; PAL; 23 mins*

The Mother of Mercy Hospice on the edge of the capital, Lusaka, was the first of its kind in Zambia. The film follows the work of the staff and volunteers both at the hospice and in the local villages and communities. The courage of patients, the resilience and despair of the staff and the dignity of how they all deal with the almost daily ritual of death makes this film an extraordinary account of the human face of AIDS in modern Africa.

**Making a difference : college volunteers abroad.**

*Director: Bob Gliner, 2000 . DVD; 58 mins*

This program highlights students doing volunteer work and engaged in service learning outside the United States. Focusing on three of the leading U.S. based programs, this documentary offers an in-depth look at experiential education set in an international context.

**Challenging perceptions : how does being a VSA volunteer change New Zealanders' perception of people in developing countries?** *Wellington: Volunteer Service Abroad, 2006. DVD; 5 mins*

This short film gives glimpses of life in developing countries and challenges myths such as people waiting for handouts. It briefly shows the work of volunteers from VSA.

**Emails from East Timor : a documentary by Peter Marra.**

*Director: Peter Marra, 2001 VHS; PAL; 56 mins*

Drawing on interviews with local people, and the sometimes controversial opinions of international volunteers, this documentary explores some of the critical issues faced by the East Timorese today. Based on a series of emails written over four months as a volunteer, Dave Owens' narration links these accounts.

CASE STUDY

# The ethics of organisations: Making sure their motivations match yours

A number of articles in this edition of *Just Change* reiterate the need to be sure of the motivation and legitimacy of the organisation you volunteer with. This ensures your money and time go to those in need, contributing to sustainable projects that are well thought through, run transparently and are responding to the needs of local people. It is also a way of providing protection for the volunteer.

One organisation whose reputation has been questioned on a wide variety of occasions is Humana People-to-People (they also go by various other names such as Tvind and TG). You may have seen the Humana posters advertising for 'development instructors' throughout Aotearoa New Zealand in late 2006.

- In 1998, the UK Charities Commission shut down Humana UK due to financial irregularities. In October 2007 another organisation with strong links to Humana was started under the name of DAPP UK (Development Aid from People to People UK).
- In 2002, leading members of Humana were prosecuted by the Danish Government for fraud in connection with their humanitarian fund. Despite a not-guilty verdict for all but one of the defendants in 2006, the government launched an appeal that is currently underway.
- The organisation has been investigated by news organisations such as The Guardian newspaper, CBS5, the BBC and journalists in Sweden and Denmark. The Guardian found that charities Humana supposedly supported through donated funds were not registered and unknown by local aid officials.



Humana headquarters in Zimbabwe, officially opened by Robert Mugabe in 1988.

*Hans La Cour, a journalist who worked with Humana for more than ten years and was one of the key witnesses at the prosecution trial in Denmark, gave us his views on the experiences of Humana volunteers.*

The Humana mode of operation is simple. Responding to calls on the Internet like: 'Are you 16+ and dreaming of Africa?', enthusiastic and well-meaning volunteers carry out work for Humana in rich countries collecting, sorting or selling second hand clothes donated by equally well-meaning citizens. Other well-intentioned volunteers travel at their own expense—and are often ill prepared—to run projects in developing countries. Lack of preparation, cultural understanding and funds, incompetent leadership and a mismatch between what was planned and what actually happens often lead to frustration, early returns home and disillusion amongst the volunteers. There is an abundance of these stories, although some volunteers do go through the experience without complaints. Many volunteers have come away broken and psychologically affected by the Humana experience.

*To learn more...*

- The website Humana Alert (<http://www.tvindalert.com>) was set up by Michael Durham, a British journalist. It collects information on the organisation and holds many testimonies from ex-volunteers detailing their experiences within the organisation.
- The Tvind Foundation has released a book detailing their side of the allegations made during the court case in Denmark. They argue that the donations have gone towards supporting legitimate humanitarian projects, which they say have directly benefited more than 6,000 people. <http://www.tvind.dk/book/Default.htm>



A \$10 million administrative centre for 'TG Pacifico' (a company whose board members include senior members of Tvind's financial directorate) was built on the south coast of Mexico in 2006.

BOOKS FROM THE DEV-ZONE LIBRARY  
HE PUKAPUKA MAI I TE KOHINGA A DEV-ZONE

**Creating a better world: interpreting global civil society, Rupert Taylor (ed). USA: Kumarian Press, 2004.**

This major work of scholarship presents cogent examples of groups within civil society—from the Seattle and Genoa protesters to transnational grassroots movements, such as Slum/Shack Dwellers International—that are creatively meeting the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interconnected world.

**Voluntarism, community life, and the American ethic, Robert S. Ogilvie. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.**

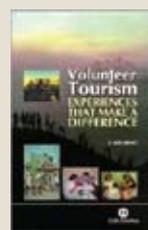
Why do people volunteer, and what motivates them to stick with it? In this fascinating study of volunteers at the Partnership for the Homeless in New York City, Robert S. Ogilvie provides bold and engaging answers to these questions.

**Religion as social capital: producing the common good, Corwin Smidt (ed). Wako, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2003.**

Religion constitutes the most common form of voluntary association in America today, yet little attention has been given to its role in promoting social capital. This is the first book-length systematic examination of the relationship between religion and social capital and its effects on democratic life in the United States.

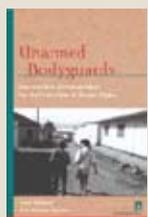
**The values of volunteering: cross-cultural perspectives, Paul Dekker and Loek Halman (ed). New York: Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, 2003.**

This book examines volunteering in detail from a civil society perspective. It deals with a broad spectrum of questions, ranging from diversity, social and cultural determinants, and organisational settings of volunteering to its possible individual, social, and political effects.



**Volunteer tourism: experiences that make a difference, Stephen Wearing. Sydney: University of Technology, 2001.**

This book provides an overview of the phenomenon of volunteer tourism—the combination of holiday and volunteer project—tracing its sources and its development to give the concept a more specific identity.



**Unarmed bodyguards: international accompaniment for the protection of human rights, Liam Mahony and Luis Enrique Eguren. USA: Kumarian Press, 1997.**

Accompaniment refers to the presence of unarmed foreign volunteers at the side of civilian activists, helping to deter violent, politically-motivated attacks and encourage democratic activities to proceed. The authors show the success of this concept through the story of Peace Brigade International's accompaniment of activists throughout the world.

**The Rumour of Calcutta: tourism, charity and the poverty of representation, John Hutnyk. London: Zed Books, 1996.**

An extraordinary study of the politics of representation, this book explores the discursive construction of Calcutta, a 'city of intensities', through the gossip and traveller-lore of backpackers and volunteer charity workers and other sources, to show how these reinforce and replicate the conditions of contemporary cultural and economic inequality.

**New Zealand abroad: the story of VSA's work in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Trevor Richards, Jeremy Rose and Margot Schwass. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books with Te Tūao Tāwāhi/Volunteer Service Abroad, 2002.**

Using a combination of photographs and text, this publication records the ideals that drive VSA. Looking at each country individually, it describes the history and work of the VSA volunteers.

**The rough guide to a better world and how you can make a difference, Martin Wroe and Malcolm Doney. London: Rough Guides Ltd, 2004.**

An accessible pocket guide that explains what global development is about and how all of us, regardless of background, income, job or experience, can play a better part in making this world better—includes advice on choosing positive volunteering opportunities, advocacy, ethical trade choices and more.

**LINKS FROM THE KNOWLEDGE CENTRE**

HE HONONGA MAI I TE PŪTAHI MĀTAURANGA  
<http://www.dev-zone.org/knowledge>

**Final report of the International Conference on Volunteerism and the MDGs**

This final conference report includes recommendations on volunteerism and the Millennium Development Goals brought forward during the International Conference on Volunteerism & the MDGs, held in December 2004 in Islamabad, Pakistan. (UN, 2004)

**Ethical Volunteering**

This site offers advice & information for people who are interested in international volunteering and want to make sure that what they do is of value to themselves and the people they work with.

**Volunteerism and Development**

Launched on International Volunteer Day, 5 December 2003, this publication introduces the reader to an analysis of successful volunteer interventions, lessons learned and good practices. (UNDP, 2003)

**Volunteering overseas in development: A guide for Aotearoa New Zealanders**

Though volunteering overseas can be rewarding, it is also full of potential pitfalls, both for the volunteer and for the project they work on. This guide can help you make good decisions about volunteering overseas, and assist you in being an effective, satisfied volunteer. (Dev-Zone, 2007)

## Take Action

### If you're thinking about volunteering in Aotearoa

**Volunteer NZ**

Regional Offices: <http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/contacts/regional.php>

Volunteer Now: <http://www.volunteernow.org.nz>

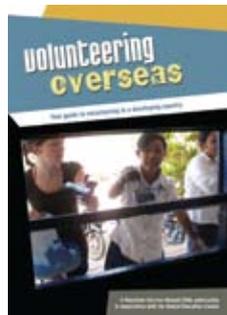
**RMS Refuge Resettlement**

<http://www.rms.org.nz>

**ESOL Home Tutors**

<http://www.esolht.org.nz>

### If you're thinking about volunteering overseas



Read VSA's guide to volunteering overseas especially written for young people, a free resource that will help you decide:

- If volunteering is right for you
- What makes a 'good' volunteering experience

- The questions you need to ask
- The checklists you need to make
- Whether it's something you could use towards your career

You can find the guide at our office, or email us for a copy.

Also read our guide on volunteering, available from <http://www.dev-zone.org> or contact us for a hard copy. Extracts from the guide appear on page 29.

**Volunteer Service Abroad**

<http://www.vsa.org.nz>

**World Volunteer Web**

<http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org>

**Idealist.org**

Idealist is an interactive site where people and organisations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps toward building a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives.

<http://www.idealist.org>

**Gap years - Gaps in Development**

Tourism Concern is running a campaign to raise awareness of the issues around GAP year volunteering. They are currently devising a Code of Practice for industry to ensure best practice.

<http://www.tourismconcern.org.uk>

## News from the DRC

*Just Change* has two new editors. Alice Beban and Elena Wrelton started at Dev-Zone as the new information officers and editors a few months ago and have been busy bringing you this issue of *Just Change*.

Kia hiwa rā! *Kaupapa: New Zealand poets, world issues* has now been published. Available to purchase from Dev-Zone direct or online and in leading bookstores. Poets from Aotearoa take on the world. Enormous issues beveled down to small shining things. A sackful of hand grenades and fireflies. [www.dev-zone.org/kaupapa](http://www.dev-zone.org/kaupapa)

NZAID's review of the DRC is almost complete with the findings overwhelmingly positive. The review's client survey generated a lot of response, and it pleases us to know that so many people are interested in our work. The review provides us with a huge amount of valuable information

that will inform our planning, services and delivery methods. Work on re-branding the DRC continues with Neogine Communication Design Ltd recruited to assist.

The Community team is soon to launch an exciting new programme for young people. Just Write is a new programme for budding young journalists and activists. Ten young people will be mentored by a media professional and supported by Just Focus throughout the year to produce stories on global issues in a variety of media.

The Schools team have been working on resources for educators, including a set of four posters concerning indigenous perspectives towards the environment, and a board game on population issues. Latest Global Issues magazines include Child Labour and Chemicals.

# Real Life Read - 'Volunteer Hamstrung by Guilt'

## A personal account of volunteering 'altruism'

In the following article, **CHARLIE DEVENISH** describes some of his experiences whilst volunteering for a Nepal-based NGO in Bista Chhap, a semi-rural village in the Kathmandu valley. During the placement, where he was initially supposed to teach at the local primary school, his experiences soon plagued him with a sense of doubt about this apparent act of altruism.

On two occasions on my first day teaching at Jwala Devi primary school I was assigned a class which already had a teacher—both times they were female and both times the principal told them to hand the class over to me. Similarly, on both occasions I was embarrassed, apologetic and unhappy with what had just happened.

The local teachers were all full-time university students who worked at the school to help support their families and fund their own education. They lived in Kathmandu city and took the 45-minute bus trip to teach at Jwala Devi school. They were paid only for the classes they taught and thus my presence was denying them of work, undermining their own teaching schedule and essentially jeopardising their own education.

Needless to say, I barely slept that first night; I felt terrible for what had happened.

I struggled through the next day's classes. The other teachers were just as welcoming and amiable as the previous day, but I was hamstrung by guilt.

That night I went to the principal's house to discuss the matter. To him there was no problem. I convinced him that I would not teach anymore and that instead I would find something else to do to fill my days. My new plan, of which the principal was supportive, was to build water taps at the school—the existing system required the school's caretaker to fetch water from the village tap. I thought that by piping water to the school from a



Running water and Jwala Devi school, but how long did it last? Photo: Charlie Devenish

nearby water source everyone would be better off and I would not be doing anyone out of a job.

I sought and gained approval from the village head for this new task. However, my limited understanding of Nepali and the abbreviated translation I received during this meeting left me wondering if it was as simple and benign as it was being made out to be.

While the impacts of this new venture were not as immediately apparent as removing a teacher from her class, a couple of days into the job I was joined by a couple of men who were obviously the local handymen—was I now doing them out of work too? Then one afternoon in the teashop I was asked why I had chosen to donate the taps, hardware and my time to Jwala Devi—a privately-owned school—when a far more deserving public school sat in desperate need of resources just across the valley.

I was left speechless as feelings of embarrassment and shame welled up inside of me.

While such seemingly obvious blunders would surely be avoided by a more seasoned, professional volunteer, my fear is that the growing stream of short-term, inexperienced, Western do-gooders flowing through small villages of the 'developing world' is verging on neo-colonialism.

In short, I would encourage those in need



Year 3 class at Jwala Devi school, Bista Chhap, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2004. Photo: Charlie Devenish

of a bout of altruism to leave the overseas work to the professional volunteers and try volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand. Not only will they dedicate a number of years rather than weeks to a community, but they will build the relationships necessary to participate in a locally-informed and truly sustainable form of development. Unfortunately, I do not believe that short-term international voluntary projects achieve these aims.

*Charlie Devenish is studying towards a Masters in Development Studies at Victoria University of Wellington in 2008.*