Power and Empowerment within Canada’s Volunteer Cooperation Program

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POWER AND EMPOWERMENT WITHIN CANADA’S VOLUNTEER COOPERATION PROGRAM

Executive Summary
Since 2004, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)’s Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP) is projected to have dispatched approximately 8,500 Canadian volunteers to developing communities around the world to participate in social and economic development programs in partnership with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (CIDA, 2009). According to the VCP, international volunteerism benefits developing communities in the Global South by transferring volunteers’ skills, knowledge, time and energy to community organizations and projects. At the same time, the Canadian public is thought to benefit from volunteer participation in development work abroad, as return volunteers then participate in a wide variety of public engagement campaigns ranging from small community events such as lectures or workshops to national-level media campaigns that educate Canadians about international development issues and strategies. It is presumed that all participants – developing community hosts, the Canadian public, and the volunteers themselves – improve their lives in some positive way through volunteering.

Although CIDA claims that the “power of volunteering” (Universalia et al., 2005) fosters social and economic development, more research is needed to confirm the positive outcomes of such programs as the VCP. There is presently a dearth of international volunteer impact assessments and evaluation reports (Sin, 2010; Tiessen & Heron, 2012) and some scholars have even speculated that international volunteers cause more harm than good while in the field (Guttentag, 2009; Mahrouse, 2011; Simpson, 2004).

This policy brief seeks to bring new insights into the functions of the Volunteer Cooperation Program by drawing from theories about power within sociology, political philosophy and critical tourism studies scholarship. Applying these insights will lead to the implementation of two primary undertakings: (1) empowerment evaluation models which can be used to assess outcomes of volunteer participation in development projects; and (2) training procedures that encourage volunteers to become self-reflective of their role, responsibilities and privileges in development institutions. The outcome of new training procedures and empowerment evaluation will result in enhanced capacity development among community members in the Global South, and a more conscientious and nuanced public engagement strategy within Canada.

Recommendations
1. Commission of a bibliographic essay to build a body of research that will inform the development of a training curriculum to be implemented at the outset of international volunteer projects. This resource should be divided into two parts: (i) theories of power and empowerment, and (ii) reflective practice and theories of learning.

2. Upon the completion of Recommendation 1, implementation of a pilot program that utilizes a Reflective Practice component to volunteer training upon the arrival of volunteers in the field. Volunteers, as well as developing community organization members and partners should participate in this training workshop.
3. Increase funding to establish a Monitoring & Evaluation program based on Empowerment Evaluation models that incorporate the participation of volunteers and community members. Empowerment Evaluation should be used to measure the success of training programs.

**Introduction: Norms of International Volunteerism and their Implications**

**The Structure of the Volunteer Cooperation Program**

CIDA’s Canadian Partnership Branch (CPB) has funded international volunteer programs for more than 50 years. Since 1960 it has deployed more than 58,000 volunteers of all professions and ages, including both professionals and students (Kelly, 2006). In 2002, CIDA began to develop a program approach to volunteer cooperation in order to foster “a more coordinated and systematic approach to enhance the potential effectiveness of volunteer cooperation” to be implemented in 2004 (Universalia et al., 2005, 7). The Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP) sought to accomplish this through funding select Volunteer Cooperation Agencies (VCAs), “organizations that are involved in both volunteer sending and receiving, in combination with development work, as a means to achieving specific goals in developing countries and engaging citizens in their own countries” (Ibid). Canadian VCAs are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work as liaisons between Canadian and Southern nation partners to “shape and deliver development initiatives that aim to benefit participating individuals and communities in developing countries” (Ibid) as well as in Canada, where volunteers are recruited to participate abroad and return back home to participate in public education and engagement programs. Each VCA considers volunteer cooperation a primary focus of organizational activities, although some VCAs focus on placing volunteers in particular countries, sectors or organizational partners. All VCAs place Canadian volunteers in the Global South. The duration of volunteer placements
among VCAs is fairly inconsistent, with some placements lasting as little as two weeks and some for six-months to several years. Each VCA maintains goals of local capacity building and public engagement in accordance with the CPB’s mandate. Each VCA is accountable to an established program logic chain, performance measurement strategy and financial measurement protocol established by the VCP (Universalia et al, 2005).

CIDA currently partners with 10 VCAs: AFS Interculture Canada; Canada World Youth; Canadian Crossroads International; Canadian Executive Service Organization; Centre canadien d’étude de cooperation international; CUSO; OXFAM-Québec; SU CO; Voluntary Service Overseas Canada; and World University Service of Canada. VCAs apply for five-year contribution agreements with CIDA on an individual basis. Eight out of the ten VCAs are largely dependent on CIDA for their funding (Universalia et al., 2005). Since the program’s implementation in 2004, these VCAs have dispatched approximately 8,500 Canadian volunteers to developing communities around the world to participate in social and economic development programs in partnership with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (CIDA, 2009).

VCAs report diverse groups of volunteers in terms of age, ethnic origin, expertise, and level of experience. One common characteristic is that among nine VCAs, women represent the majority of recruits (ranging between 55 to 75%) (Universalia et al., 2005). Unfortunately, quantitative data of volunteers is generally unavailable so it is difficult to assess the demographics of volunteers in greater depth.

One year after its inception, a review commissioned by CIDA’s Performance Knowledge Management Branch and undertaken by independent consultants Universalia,
E.T. Jackson and Associates and SALASAN/Geospatial described the role of Canadian volunteers as to:

... help improve the lives of people and their communities in developing countries around the world by working with and strengthening Southern social and economic development organizations. These unpaid individuals contribute their time, expertise and experience to global sustainable human development. (Universalia et al., 2005, 7)

The review optimistically indicated that the VCP has achieved considerable success at its twin goals of enabling capacity development among developing communities and their organizations while simultaneously educating the Canadian public who benefited from both formal and informal types of public education that volunteers shared upon their return (Universalia et al., 2005). In 2009, CIDA committed funding of an additional $244.6 million over the subsequent 5 years to increase the number of overseas Canadian volunteers from approximately 2,500 to 8,500; this was a significant increase compared to the $42 million spent over the previous five years (CIDA, 2009).

**Challenging Assumptions of International Volunteerism**

CIDA’s emphasis on the utility and worth of international volunteerism can be viewed in tandem with the increasing trend for volunteer tourism expeditions. Preeminent tourism studies scholar, Stephen Wearing describes volunteer tourists as those who “volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding or alleviating of material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment” (2001, p. 1). CIDA’s international volunteerism program should not be viewed synonymously with the phenomenon of ‘volunteer tourism’ (also, commonly referred to as ‘voluntourism’), as the term ‘tourism’ may also imply those volunteers whose expeditions are organized through
the private sector, rather than through a publicly funded VCA. It is important to note that
the VCP maintains protocols to ensure the accountability and transparency of its
programming and practices, safeguards that private sector travel agencies are not
obligated to hold in place. Nevertheless, the growing body of research on volunteerism
within tourism studies provides important insight into the common trends and dynamics of
North-South international volunteerism.

The inherent value of working abroad has become a largely uncontested norm in
Canadian development practice. Recently, a vehement response from evaluation and
critical scholarly communities has questioned this norm, suggesting that volunteerism does
not necessarily achieve its desired outcomes and may even cause more harm than benefit.
Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that practices of international volunteerism
should be completely abandoned for their perpetuation of imperialist agendas on the
Global South. This brief acknowledges the limitations and unequal power relations that
may emerge in volunteerism, but goes on to suggest that the practice must be understood
holistically, containing both oppressive and emancipatory potential.

A recent evaluation report on the perceived impact of international volunteers
funded by the Canadian International Development Research Council (IDRC) challenges the
supposed benefits, claiming that at present there is a dearth of literature from which to
evaluate the impacts of international volunteer programs like the VCP (Tiessen & Heron,
2012). The IDRC study observed that youth participants in international volunteer
programs are rarely asked to justify their time abroad (to themselves, nor to Canadian
taxpayers) and are seldom held accountable for their actions while traveling (Ibid). These
volunteers identified positive impacts that they perceived their work had on communities,
such as the opportunity to facilitate cross-cultural learning, impart new ideas and Canadian values, and generally act as role models for community members, (Ibid). They also identified a number of negative impacts that their work had, such as the creation of false hope for change in the community, the creation of Canadian stereotypes and the perpetuation of cycles of dependency on foreign development agencies. Some also considered their skill-level and time spent in the field as inadequate to address community issues (Ibid). As a result, volunteer participants in the study were frequently unable to provide answers when asked if they perceived that their intervention in a developing community was justified. Thus, volunteers were themselves dubious or unclear about how effectively they contributed to the capacity development of Southern partners.

Scholars and evaluators have also noted shortcomings regarding volunteer program evaluations, suggesting that further research needs to be conducted before the impacts can be presumed as entirely positive (Sin, 2010). Guttentag (2009) has speculated that volunteer interventions may even be counterproductive to a community’s interests by neglecting locals’ needs and Indigenous knowledge, impeding work progress by unsatisfactorily completing tasks, disrupting local economies, and even reinforcing local poverty by driving up prices.

Add to this the fact that research in critical tourism studies suggests that, at least within the private sector, volunteer expeditions can turn development work into a commodity that can be purchased and consumed as recreation by the global elite (Coren & Gray, 2012; Lyons et al., 2012). These scholars contend that volunteer tourists are unknowingly complicit in ongoing imperialist processes, wherein the Global North exerts its control over the South under the auspices of providing aid. At its worst, volunteerism is
thought to disseminate hegemonic norms from the colonial center (Richter, 2010; Sin, 2010) that undermine local autonomy and ability. For example, Cori Jakubiak’s study of volunteer English language teachers in developing communities (2012) demonstrates that this type of teaching reinforces a form of hyperglobalism, wherein globalization is “driven exclusively by North-based economic, cultural, and political apparatuses” (Jakubiak, 2012, p. 438). These authors lament that neither volunteers nor volunteer-sending agencies take into consideration the potential for negative impacts that these expeditions may have on their target communities.

Researchers also argue that the educational component for volunteers themselves lacks substance, as a volunteer’s encounter with community members tends to aestheticize (Mostafanezhad, 2013a; Mostafanezhad, 2013b) or rationalize poverty (Crossley, 2012; Sin, 2009), placing undue importance on their own interventions and attributing authenticity to commercially-constructed exchanges. For example, Kate Simpson has noted the “poor-but-happy” attitude adopted by volunteers, who explain their encounters with poverty by stating that developing community members are accustomed to their lives of poverty and therefore are unbothered by their circumstances (Simpson, 2004, p. 688). Volunteers romanticize poverty from their experiences in the field, relating it to conceptions of “social and emotional wealth” (Guttentag, 2008, p. 546). Although this exposure to different cultures and lifestyles may provide educational moments, responses such as these indicate that participants do not necessarily learn about these different cultures, but more accurately project their own values and assumptions onto the experiences of others.

Advocating a Balanced Perspective: Between Oppression/Emancipation
This brief takes the position best articulated in the works of Nancy McGehee (2002; 2012) and McGehee and Carla Santos (2005), that volunteer tourism is neither wholly oppressive nor wholly emancipatory. Rather than considered in such binary terms, volunteerism should be evaluated as having both negative and positive outcomes at home and abroad. For instance, though it promotes international mobility, it often benefits certain classes of travellers over others (typically, Northern volunteers from higher socio-economic backgrounds). While the VCP would benefit from improved volunteer training mechanisms and evaluation procedures, the program nevertheless contains the potential to build political consciousness and an increased awareness of privilege. In this sense, international volunteerism is a practice through which both new and old social practices are combined, developed and defined. Although volunteerism forms and mobilizes social networks and enables institutional critiques, these may have the effect of perpetuating rather than alleviating cycles of dependency and impoverishment.

While Canadian volunteer tourists should be commended for their desire and energy to contribute to poverty alleviation strategies in the Global South, the VCP’s current mechanisms to train volunteers and to evaluate the outcomes of participation in community development projects do not effectively contribute to the program’s goals of capacity development and public engagement. Although altruism, described by Joanne Ingram as the desire “to make a difference” is among the most frequently cited reasons for international volunteer participation, this altruism often obscures the previously stated negative impacts that volunteerism may have on developing communities (Ingram, 2011, p. 219). Volunteers’ altruism is often a useful and commendable motivator, but it can also result in the projection of preconceived notions about poverty in the Global South.
Volunteers assume that they will positively influence or enhance the communities in which they work, simply by showing up with good intentions. Perceived impacts in the community are, in many cases, predetermined by volunteers’ anticipations rather than by their actual work experiences in the field (Tiessen & Heron, 2012). Subsequently, results from evaluation procedures are unreliable as they fail to capture the missed opportunities for educational moments in instances of cross-cultural communication.

How to move forward?
The VCP presently lacks formal mechanisms to encourage critical inquiry of the development industry and institutions, reflective practices within volunteer experiences in order to encourage ongoing learning processes, and any specific framework for evaluation of the empowerment of participating individuals, communities or organizations affiliated with the VCP. Due to this oversight, the VCP is limited in its ability to foster self-reflective volunteers who understand the full implications of their presence in developing communities. As a result, this undermines both the quality of their work while participating on development projects, and the information that is disseminated throughout future public engagement initiatives.

The policy recommendations made in this brief seek to improve the quality of volunteers’ on-site education, resulting in an increased value of their work and a more comprehensive and nuanced public engagement strategy to adequately address the needs and demands of CIDA’s partners in the Global South. This can be measured through empowerment evaluation procedures – to be outlined below – and the observation of variables such as emerging political consciousness among volunteers and community members, the formation of cross-cultural and international social networks and social
movements, and increased motivation to participate in community development initiatives both domestically and globally.

**Operations of Power and Empowerment in the VCP**

**What do we mean we talk about ‘power’?**

In their evaluation report, *The Power of Volunteering: A Review of the Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program*, consultants observed a key relationship between volunteerism and the power to affect social change:

> International volunteering is a *powerful* mechanism in development co-operation for several reasons. It forges bonds between and among Canadians (be they individual volunteers, civil society organizations, NGOs or representatives of the Canadian government) and their counterparts in the South, creating the basis for meaningful co-operation, action and results around common goals, be it at community, organizational or societal levels. (Universalia et al., 2005, 4)

The VCP operates under the presumption that international volunteerism empowers all of its constituents, mutually and reciprocally. Yet the VCP and its evaluators invoke a discourse of power that is devoid of self-reflection, criticality or any discernible theoretical framework. As a starting point, this policy brief asks the following questions of the Volunteer Cooperation Program:

1. What kind of power is in fact generated through the practice of volunteerism?

2. How do experiences of power differ for constituents in the Global South in comparison to the experiences of Canadians?

3. How and in what ways does CIDA, and by extension the VCP, construct and reinforce power dynamics among its constituents? This question is not intended to criticize CIDA specifically, but rather to interrogate how institutions, in a broad and general sense, reflect or reproduce power relationships and construct the identities of their members.

Positive benefits may emerge through the administration of international Volunteer Cooperation Programs, such as CIDA’s, but it remains imperative to identify and demarcate
instances and relations of power generated through the practice of international
volunteerism that require further consideration in order to meet the VCP’s goals. CIDA’s
conception of a volunteer’s ‘power’ requires further examination to help reveal unintended
yet oppressive elements of volunteer practice.

Alternative conceptions of ‘power’ are interwoven into the phenomenon of
volunteerism, and CIDA’s use of this terminology, which will be interrogated below:

- Power is commonly conceived of as a capacity, ability or agency to enact one’s will. However, power may also be described as an asymmetric relationship among different parties, wherein one—be it an individual, group or institution—holds ‘power over’ the capacity, ability or agency of another, in order to constrain their choices and assure their compliance (Lukes, 2005). The VCP’s use of power discourse suggests that it enables its constituents rather than constraining them, but this assumption merits further examination.

- Sociologist, Max Weber’s (1968) study of power among institutions argues that power is synonymous with domination and that domination is an intrinsic element of any political or hierocratic organization. Every functionary has his or her own specific duties, which leads to the greatest efficiency and effectiveness of the entire bureaucratic apparatus. In this sense, a government agency like CIDA functions best through the domination of its members (Galbraith, 1983) which runs counterintuitive to CIDA’s use of the term power as a capacity or ability.

- Political philosopher, Michel Foucault (1995; 1990; 1980) suggests that power is relational, circulating throughout all social relations and institutions by creating systems of knowledge and by normalizing certain behaviors and practices. In this sense, power produces the conditions that allow for international volunteerism to exist by privileging some with the time, resources and abilities to volunteer, just as it produces the conditions that restrict and impede the supposed beneficiaries of volunteerism who are thought to rely on volunteer assistance.

Power is clearly a contested concept. The term is used to imply forces that dominate as well as liberate and constrain as well as enable. This same tension is prevalent in the previously mentioned studies of international volunteerism as a social practice that both oppresses and emancipates community members (McGehee, 2012). Steps to address this tension may be sought from an empowerment-based perspective.
Empowerment and Empowerment Evaluation

Within international development discourse, ‘empowerment’ often refers to the use of grassroots movements, participatory methods and locally-organized poverty reduction strategies primarily focusing around women’s needs (Parpart et al., 2002). It may occur on an individual, community or organizational level. Empowerment is both a process and an outcome of these kinds of development strategies. CIDA currently uses an empowerment approach to gender and development (GAD) issues, but has yet to apply such an approach to other facets of its operations.

These principles of empowerment are widely invoked among development practitioners, although they are frequently used to signify different meanings. For example, The World Bank (2002) defines empowerment as an expansion of assets and capabilities to enable poor people to influence, control or negotiate with institutions, whereas post-Marxist theorists Giles Mohan and Kristian Stokke (2000) use the same word to imply a collective mobilization of oppressed people that results directly in a structural transformation of the state or market.

For the purposes of international volunteerism, this brief considers empowerment as a process of personal and collective transformation that includes the participation of volunteers and developing community members. Although each volunteer project will be different in scope, intention and outcome, participants will collaborate together to set their own individual and collective goals. Establishing goals at the outset of a volunteer project will allow all participants to understand each other’s perspectives. It will facilitate the recognition of relative positions of power and privilege by demonstrating individuals’ needs, and will incite opportunities for reflective practice for volunteers while on the job.
The outcomes of empowerment can be measured by Empowerment Evaluation techniques. Following established evaluator David Fetterman’s approach, these techniques provide participants and project stakeholders with the tools necessary to plan, implement and self-evaluate a project based on mutually-agreed upon needs and outcomes (Fetterman, 2011). Evaluation facilitators participate in the process through the role of a ‘critical friend’ by asking questions that encourage self-assessment for the purpose of improving the project and building capacities among participants (Ibid). Participants are nevertheless ‘in charge’ of the evaluation process, and collectively work together to determine the purpose of the evaluation, the ways in which it will be conducted and how the results will be disseminated or implemented.

The process can be described in three steps: 1. Outlining the Mission (reaffirming goals and a mission statement, determining group values and democratic methods for conducting the evaluation), 2. Taking Stock (acknowledging evaluation priorities, conflicts and challenges within the project, as well as successes), and 3. Planning for the Future (setting goals for future projects and developing evidence-based strategies by which to achieve them) (Ibid).

**CIDA’s Interest in International Volunteerism**

CIDA is already aware of the multiple benefits that international volunteerism can yield for both developing communities and the Canadian public. Nevertheless, the current practice overseen by the VCP has missed key opportunities to ensure the quality and efficacy of their volunteer program. At present, the VCP presumes that educational moments occur through a volunteer’s placement in an environment far removed from their normal daily lives. Here, the volunteer contributes their time and energy to develop the capacities of the
local community members, and the organization with which they are partnered, and learns about the community and culture of their placement, while simultaneously fostering firsthand skills relating to development practice. While some learning takes place organically through participation, the best results will be achieved for all constituents through the implementation of self-reflective components of volunteer training and empowerment evaluation of volunteer project outcomes. Through these mechanisms, the following benefits will occur:

- **Developing communities and developing community organizations** will benefit from the opportunity to express their personal and collective goals, motivations and needs upon the arrival of volunteers during training and orientation sessions. This will offset an ongoing problem in international volunteerism wherein local needs and knowledge are neglected or devalued. Improved communication will also foster better overall project results to the benefit of the community.

- Participating **Canadian volunteers** will gain insight into their own goals, motivations and needs while working in the field. They will be given a chance to express themselves to their colleagues while benefitting from their colleagues’ insights.

- The **Canadian public** will benefit from more accurate and reflective public engagement initiatives conducted by return volunteers who have participated in training procedures that encourage self-awareness and a critical eye towards the value and scope of development interventions.

**Other Volunteer Programs in Canada: Private Sector Tourism and Internships**

At present, a multitude of organizations exist to send Canadians overseas to participate in development projects as volunteers. These include, but are not limited to, private sector travel agencies that recruit and place tourists in international volunteer and International Youth Internship programs administered by the Canadian government. Each offers a different policy alternative for the Volunteer Cooperation Program.

At present, none of the program options listed below are known to have reflective practice-based models for training incoming volunteers, nor empowerment evaluation
models in place. This brief encourages CIDA to become a pioneer for this form of international volunteer training.

i) Private Sector Travel Agencies

Following increasing neoliberal trends in the development industry, one option is for CIDA to outsource volunteer placement to the private sector in lieu of the NGOs that it currently funds in the VCP. One need only perform a simple Google search to reveal the plethora of private sector companies that have emerged in recent years that match volunteers with development community organizations in the Global South.

Globally, this phenomenon has become increasingly profitable. Tourism Research and Marketing (2008) suggests that 1.6 million tourists participate in volunteer programs a year and that the “total expenditure generated by volunteerism is likely to be between £832 million ($1.66 billion [USD]) and £1.3 billion ($2.6 billion [USD])” (TRAM, 2008, p. 42). These for-profit enterprises market themselves as ‘alternative tourism’ expeditions that enable tourists to travel sustainably and ethically, to meet locals and experience authentic cultural life within the communities that they work.

Advantages exist primarily for the tourist. These packages offer flexible arrival and departure dates, customized itineraries and project placements, and frequently pre-arranged accommodation, food preparation and transportation. There are many disadvantages for development community organizations due to the flexibility of organizing volunteer placements as tourist packages. Projects are subject to unreliable schedules of volunteers, who elect to enter or leave the community at times suitable to their travel schedules, rather than at the beginning or end of project cycles. Volunteers do not necessarily have specific skills or the knowledge applicable to development projects,
but the lenient recruitment process and need for volunteer assistance means that community organizations do not have many choices but to accept volunteers from private sector Canadian recruiters. As these are often sold as packages for tourists, who elect to undertake this work in their leisure time, there are few measures in place to evaluate volunteer performance or standardize reflective practice or ongoing learning opportunities for volunteers upon their return. These organizations also lack the same mandate for transparency and accountability that CIDA upholds.

ii) **CIDA International Youth Internship Program (IYIP)**

Funding could be redirected toward internship programs in order to facilitate the training of youths with an interest in pursuing a career in the field of development.

IYIP is a program for Canadian graduates between the ages of 19-30, funded by CIDA in conjunction with the Youth Employment Strategy (YES). The program is designed to provide Canadian youth with international work experience and increase their employability, as well as to educate young Canadians about the international development industry while contributing to “the advancement of CIDA’s mandate to reduce poverty, promote human rights and increase sustainable development and to meet CIDA’s priorities for official development assistance” (FATDC, 2012).

Its advantages lie in its training of Canadian youth, which includes an ongoing commitment to public engagement upon return to Canada. CIDA pays partner organizations in the South up to $15 000 CAD to fund the intern participant, so organizations receive volunteer labour at no additional cost. This funding also goes towards a stipend for the intern to mitigate their own personal costs. Interns must apply
for positions that are more competitive than those handled by private sector volunteer recruiters, and so such interns are arguably more qualified than leisure travelers.

The disadvantage to this policy option is its training procedure. Interns receive country-specific de-briefing and go through a pre-departure training, but this is not based around practices of reflective inquiry, nor empowerment-based approaches that consider the need for sharing of goals, outcomes and feelings. The benefit is again presumed to be mutual, but there is little proof to support this claim.

**Recommendations**

1. **Commission of a bibliographic essay to build a body of research that will inform the development of a training curriculum to be implemented at the outset of international volunteer projects.** This resource should be divided in two parts: (i) theories of power and empowerment, and (ii) reflective practice and theories of learning.

(i) Different conceptions of ‘power’ change the way in which we conceive of institutions and their roles in administering social or economic change. For example, are institutions enabling or constraining the autonomy and decision-making of developing community organizations and volunteers? Theoretical insight into the power held by institutions, and the individuals who operate within them will inform curricula designed to improve the quality of volunteer work performed by enabling cross-cultural cooperation/collaboration, capacity development and critical inquiry/creative problem solving. Additionally, a compendium of resources that address the empowerment approach to international development practice, including both theoretical frameworks and case studies, will also provide insight into the steps that volunteers and community partners make take to mobilize resources in order to identify and achieve common goals.
ii) In a development context, Reflective Practices are “methods and techniques that help individuals and groups reflect on their own and other’s experiences and actions” (Participatory Methods, 2013). Reflective Practice is a form of continuous learning that may be used to identify paradigms and shape thought and action around “issues of position, conflict, resistance and power relationships, which are often present but not dealt with in development” (Ibid). Volunteerism within the development industry, and within communities in the Global South, may be regarded as a form of Legitimate Peripheral Participation; a model of education similar to apprenticeship that “concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 29). A compendium of knowledge concerning self-reflective learning practices among those who are novice development practitioners will help curriculum writers to develop training mechanisms that encourage volunteers to participate in ongoing processes of self-reflection throughout their time working abroad. This will result in greater volunteer effectiveness while in the field and a more comprehensive ability to facilitate public engagement initiatives upon return to Canada.

2. Upon the completion of Recommendation 1, implementation of a pilot program that utilizes a Reflective Practice component to volunteer training upon the arrival of volunteers in the field. Volunteers, as well as developing community organization members and partners should participate in this training workshop.

The specific forms of Reflective Practice best suited to the needs of the VCP will depend upon the outcomes of the findings in the bibliographic essay proposed in Recommendation 1. These may include journaling, peer review processes, developing cooperative inquiry/research projects, body movement/theater workshops, significant incident analysis or mentoring programs. It may also prove beneficial for project participants to
individually and collectively express their goals in participation and to participate in some form of anti-oppression training. Intended outcomes of Reflective Practice include: consciousness-building, recognizing examples of privilege, the formation and mobilization of social networks and critical analysis of institutions.

3. **Increase funding to establish a Monitoring & Evaluation program based on Empowerment Evaluation models that incorporate the participation of volunteers and community members.** **Empowerment Evaluation should be used to measure the success of training programs.**

Empowerment Evaluation is an approach that fosters improvement and self-determination among developing communities (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2005). It provides programs’ participants and stakeholders “with tools for assessing the planning, implementation, and self-evaluation of their program” (Fetterman, 2011) by encouraging the participation of all in the evaluation process under the direction of a facilitator. This style of evaluation should take place at the conclusion of all international volunteer placements as a process of reflection on the goals initially established by volunteers and community members at the outset of the project. Reflection on goals, as well as the process/methods, the outcomes and impacts that were both expected and unanticipated, and the criteria used to measure or identify these outcomes and impacts will all contribute to ongoing reflective practices of volunteers and community members, and will also serve as important guidelines in future projects within specific communities. For best results, professional empowerment evaluators will need to be hired to facilitate collaborative evaluation sessions among volunteers, representatives from developing community organizations and the beneficiaries of these projects. Ideally these evaluators will train DCO members who can then take on the facilitating process throughout future cycles.

**Conclusion**
International volunteerism is a complex phenomenon that yields both positive and negative impacts. It should not be assumed, as CIDA does, that volunteer abroad programs are intrinsically useful for Developing Community Organizations in the Global South or for volunteers and their communities upon their return. Although volunteer experiences can foster the formation of social networks and encourage ongoing commitment to development issues, improvements to volunteer training curricula must be made in order to justify these kinds of expeditions. For best results, volunteers must be trained to think critically about the power relations interwoven in the dynamic between themselves and their host communities. This can be achieved through the implementation of a reflective practice component in all training sessions at the outset of a volunteer’s placement and maintained throughout the duration of the volunteer’s stay. Empowerment evaluation methods may be used at the conclusion of the volunteer’s placement to assess outcomes. These can then be adopted and implemented into a public engagement strategy for educational purposes upon the volunteer’s return to Canada.

Annotated Bibliography: Useful Resources for Further Insight


As a leader in the field of empowerment evaluation, David Fetterman has conducted multiple seminars and workshops to train empowerment evaluation facilitators working towards project achievement or community development. Fetterman’s approach enables all project stakeholders, including community members and program beneficiaries, to participate in the evaluation process. The principles that he advocates include: reflective practice, building a community of learners, establishing cycles of reflection and action, developing a culture of evidence, and identifying and using a critical friend. This volume, co-edited with Abraham Wandersman, offers case studies and guiding wisdom on how to best implement these practices in community evaluation programs.

As one of the most widely cited scholars in the field of volunteer tourism studies, McGehee’s work offers a critical, yet balanced account of the industry and its standard practices. In this essay she argues that the practice of volunteer tourism may result in both beneficial outcomes (i.e. the development of political consciousness among volunteers and the formation of trans-national, cross-cultural social networks that span from the Global North to the Global South) and negative ones (i.e. burdening the host community, perpetuating cycles of dependency, exoticizing locals). McGehee argues that the phenomenon of volunteer tourism is both oppressive and emancipatory for developing community organizations and community members.


This study was commissioned by the International Development Research Council (IDRC) to examine the perceived outcomes of volunteerism among youth participants in international work/study abroad programs. Many interviewees indicated both positive and negative impacts that they felt they had on the communities in which they worked, although many of them were unable to say whether or not they felt that their intervention in these communities was justified. This challenges the largely uncontested norm within development practice in Canada that assumes it is inherently beneficial for young volunteers to go abroad to apprentice in the development industry. The authors claim that at present a dearth of research exists on the impacts of volunteer labour in developing communities. More studies must be conducted to verify that programs such as the VCP are as effective as they claim, as volunteers themselves cannot reliably state that they have contributed positively.


This is the only evaluation report of the Volunteer Cooperation Program, undertaken only one of year after the program’s implementation. It describes the potential benefits of international volunteerism for empowering both developing community organizations and their members in the Global South as well as the Canadian public. International volunteers contribute to the capacity development of developing community organizations and the education of Canadians through public engagement initiatives upon their return. In this sense, the power of volunteering is thought to benefit all constituents.


Wearing is a preeminent scholar in volunteer tourism studies; one of the founders of the field, who has contributed one of the most widely cited definitions of volunteer tourists as “those who volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that may involve the aiding
or alleviating of material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments, or research into aspects of society or environment” (240). His early work focuses on the construction of the “self” in volunteer tourism, suggesting that volunteer participants undergo transformative processes of identity re-formation through their experience volunteering. Following from this, the emphasis in the field has predominantly focused on the study of motivations, experiences and impacts on volunteers, rather than those of their counterparts in developing communities, or evaluations of the outcomes of their work.

1 International volunteers contribute to positive impacts on organizations’ motivation (Universalia et al., 2005, p. 37), capacities – through the transfer of specific skills and knowledge (Ibid, 38) - performance – through introducing new programs or improving the quality and/or reach of existing programs - and increasingly the credibility and visibility of the DCOs (Ibid, 39). Volunteer placements are also thought to “lead to longer term, mutually beneficial relationships between Canadian civil society organizations and DCOs” (Ibid, 40).

2 VCAs in Canada also contribute to educational programs and activities in Canada, ranging in size and scope “from small community events organized by RVs [Return Volunteers] to talk about their overseas experience, to national-level, multi-faceted campaigns aimed at broad Canadian audiences” (Universalia et al., 2005, p. 41) including exhibits, publications, cultural events, newsletters, websites, speakers series and workshops, curriculum development/classroom resources, films and media productions, fundraising campaigns, etc. The review found that “As a result of VCA public engagement activities, Canadians have developed a great understanding of and openness to different cultures in the developing world and in Canada” (Ibid, 43) and that “Canadians consistently noted that VCA’s public-engagement activities increased their knowledge, awareness and sensitivity to development and related issues” (Ibid, 44). Resulting from this, VCA public engagement activities have motivated Canadian individuals and institutions to get more involved or to stay involved in community work and international development initiatives through financial donations or increased volunteer support (Ibid, 45).
References


