

VALUING VOLUNTEERING - MOZAMBIQUE

COMMUNITY YOUTH CHURCH VOLUNTEERS: TRUST AND MOTIVATIONS

A Systemic Action Research Inquiry

2015



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The *Valuing Volunteering* research has also been made possible by the generous contributions of **Cuso International** and **Pears Foundation**.



Credits

Text: Alexandra Picken

Research: Alexandra Picken

Editing: Ken Moxham

Layout: marcomadruga.com

Cover photo: ©VSO/Ginny Lattul

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Acknowledgements

Sincere respect and gratitude is extended to the community church *activistas* who participated in the research over the two-year period. Their patience (especially in the face of language difficulties) and hard work contributed enormously to the success of *Valuing Volunteering* in Mozambique. The learning that has emerged from this case study will hopefully benefit their own volunteer group and help to shed light on important dynamics of volunteering that will prove useful nationally and for the volunteer sector more widely.

Special thanks goes to one particular *activista* who maintained great enthusiasm right to the end of the research. The findings would not have been possible without your dedication.

Also warm thanks to the other community members, groups and institutions that contributed to the research, and to the *secretário do bairro* for beginning to increase access to his network.

Abbreviations

CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CDC	<i>Chefe de Casas</i>
CDQ	<i>Chefe do Quarteirão</i>
CNV	Conselho Nacional do Voluntariado (National Volunteer Council)
MOH	Ministry of Health
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OJM	Organização da Juventude Moçambicana (Organisation of Mozambican Youth)
OMM	Organização da Mulher Moçambicana (Organisation of Mozambican Women)
PSAR	Participatory Systemic Action Research
PSI	Participatory Systemic Inquiries
SAR	Systemic Action Research
SDB	<i>Secretário do Bairro</i>
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas

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Executive summary

This case study focuses on community-based youth volunteers with foundations in the church. The volunteers' work is in the area of health, with sexual health the group's particular area of focus. The volunteers' main role is to undertake sensitisation activities in the community. Their capacity and support in terms of funding, strategy and administration is low, and the group can be described as informal, in that it operates outside the formal local governance structures and is not associated with donor-funded projects.

This case study looks at the church-based community volunteers' ability to effect change in their community. It provides an example of volunteers working in informal spaces, whilst negotiating relationships with formal governance structures and political elites, in order to further understand *Valuing Volunteering's* overarching research question: how, when and why volunteering impacts on poverty.

The volunteer group is based in a peri-urban neighbourhood of Maputo, the capital of Mozambique. The HIV prevalence rate in Maputo City is 19.8% (adults aged 15–49) and absolute poverty stands at 36.2%. The volunteers are addressing a real felt community need concerning issues related to sexual health practice and knowledge. They do this primarily through information sharing and sensitisation. Young people directly supported by the volunteers highlighted that they have experienced cognitive and behavioural changes around these areas and felt that these changes are sustainable.

A number of issues impact on volunteers' capacity to address health needs in the community. These include language and communication barriers. General literacy rates and access to information are very low in Mozambique. Furthermore, only 6.5% of the population speak Portuguese as their mother tongue. These issues make the distribution of information at the individual, household and community levels, and the role of *activistas* in facilitating this, even more important. However, volunteers cited low education levels and multiple language issues as a major barrier to sharing information. As a result, some of the poorest in the community, who may be most in need of accessing this information, were not being reached by the volunteers.

The community volunteers had relatively limited connections with formal local governance structures. This reduced their ability to be seen as credible and trustworthy deliverers of information and services, and limited their access to resources and local networks. *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique* found that it can be difficult for volunteers to build relationships with local governance structures as there is a risk that they may lose some of their autonomy in doing so. Volunteers may only be trusted if they are considered to be maintaining, rather than challenging, the status quo and this may require them to work in less contentious areas and to assimilate to a more formal permission-giving relationship with local governance structures.

1. Introduction

This case study focuses on community-based youth volunteers who are associated with the local church, in an urban neighbourhood of Maputo City, Mozambique. They work in the area of health, with sexual health the group's particular area of focus. Their main role is to undertake sensitisation activities in the community. Their capacity and support in terms of funding, strategy and administration is low, and the group can be described as informal, in that it operates outside the formal local governance structures and is not associated with donor-funded projects.

This case study looks at the church-based community volunteers' ability to effect change in their community. It provides an example of volunteers working in informal spaces, whilst negotiating relationships with formal governance structures and political elites, in order to further understand *Valuing Volunteering's* overarching research question: how, when and why volunteering impacts on poverty.

A two-year process of systemic action research (SAR) was undertaken with the volunteers from this locality (SAR is explained in more detail in the Methodology section). This participatory process allowed issues to emerge that deepened insights into the study's central questions. This case study will draw out important findings that emerged during the SAR inquiry, and in addition will highlight important process learning from utilising a SAR approach.

Why church-based volunteers?

There are a number of reasons why the research site was selected. Firstly, it gave opportunities to understand how volunteering works within a specific local political environment and how volunteers may be affected by local-level politics, particularly with regard to relationships with influential actors within the system.

Secondly, a benefit of the informal nature of the volunteer group was that there were few pre-existing connections with the organisations at the centre of the research (e.g. VSO Mozambique). This allowed for an independent and unbiased inquiry, and ensured that the research would not be affected by agendas that could attempt to reinforce existing relationships or connections. The connection with an external group, separate from pre-existing projects, allowed for the possibility for any such dynamics to be sidestepped.

Initial contact was facilitated by an IDS staff member who had previously been undertaking a project on citizen journalism with the group. The process started broadly with an exploratory inquiry which developed organically in the initial stages. As the inquiry matured, the main questions it attempted to answer were:

- (i) How do systems of local governance affect community volunteering?
- (ii) What types of relationship are important for volunteering?

This study will give an overview of the types of volunteers involved in the inquiry, the volunteers' theory of change and explore how they were attempting to address community needs. It will examine the barriers the volunteers face in effectively conducting their activities and how an SAR approach was used to attempt to address these challenges.

Background

Poverty

In Mozambique poverty is high. Mozambique is ranked 185th out of 187 countries on the human development index. As many as 79.3% of the population are living in multi-dimensional poverty and 59.6% of the population are living on less than US\$1.25 (purchasing power parity) per day (UNDP, 2013). Life expectancy at birth is 50.7 years, and 490 out of 100,000 women die of pregnancy-related causes each year. The average number of schooling years in secondary or higher education is 1.2 for adults. For children of primary age the average number of school years is 9.2 (UNDP, 2013).

Politics

While Mozambique is a democracy with an electoral process, it is still considered to be a 'one-party' state, wherein "political pluralism is a very recent phenomenon... and ever since the first multi-party elections in 1994, there has been a clear 2 way split in the political arena between [the opposition] and [the party]. However, while it is true that the Mozambican political scenario is still marked by bipolarisation, it is no less true that [the party] has gradually expanded its domination and political hegemony" (Open Society Institute Network, 2009, p10).

Mozambican society is strongly influenced by certain political persuasions. This leads to the autonomy of civil society spaces being questioned, given that "most of the organisations that comprise it are dependent on or tied to [the party] and the government" (ibid., p67). This can have a positive influence because the "Interaction between political society and civil society can lead to greater participation of the latter in public matters". But there are also negative consequences of this lack of independence, with "the autonomy of organisations... affected by such ties [whereby] political parties [begin] making use of civil society organisations to advance their political interests" (ibid., p.68).

The one-party system, and the consequent/resultant merging of political and civil society spaces, and their effects on the functioning of volunteers operating at the local level, will be explored in this case study.

Access to information

There are 24 different languages spoken in Mozambique. While the official language is Portuguese, only 6.5% of the population speak this as their mother tongue, and only 39% of the population speak Portuguese at all (ibid., p.61). Access to broadcasting or information sources such as television or radio is limited: 4% of the population state that they read papers more than once per week and only 10% of the population watch television. Although 50% listen to radio regularly, this still leaves 50% of the population without regular access to information through this means (ibid., p54). This is of importance when considering the ways in which volunteers make changes in their community through awareness-raising activities.

Overview of case study locality

The volunteer group are based in Aeroporto A. The green balloon next to Urbanizacao in Figure 1 indicates where Aeroporto A is situated within the city of Maputo. It is a relatively central area slightly out of town but still within Maputo City itself. Aeroporto A is a peri-urban area with relatively good access to the city and within walking distance of the hospital and health services.

Figure 1. Map of Maputo



Population of Maputo city	1,194,121 (2010)
Poverty rate Maputo city	36.2% (2009)
HIV prevalence (adults aged 15–49)	19.8% (9% of all people living with HIV in Mozambique)
HIV prevalence (male)	19.5%
HIV prevalence (female)	20%

Local governance structure in Mozambique

The red box in Figure 2 highlights an important figure in everyday activities in Mozambique. The secretary of the neighbourhood (*secretário do bairro* (SDB)) is the local-level authority. They are the focal point for authorising community and volunteer activities, and information about activities in the community will always pass through the SDB to the structures further up the administrative hierarchy.

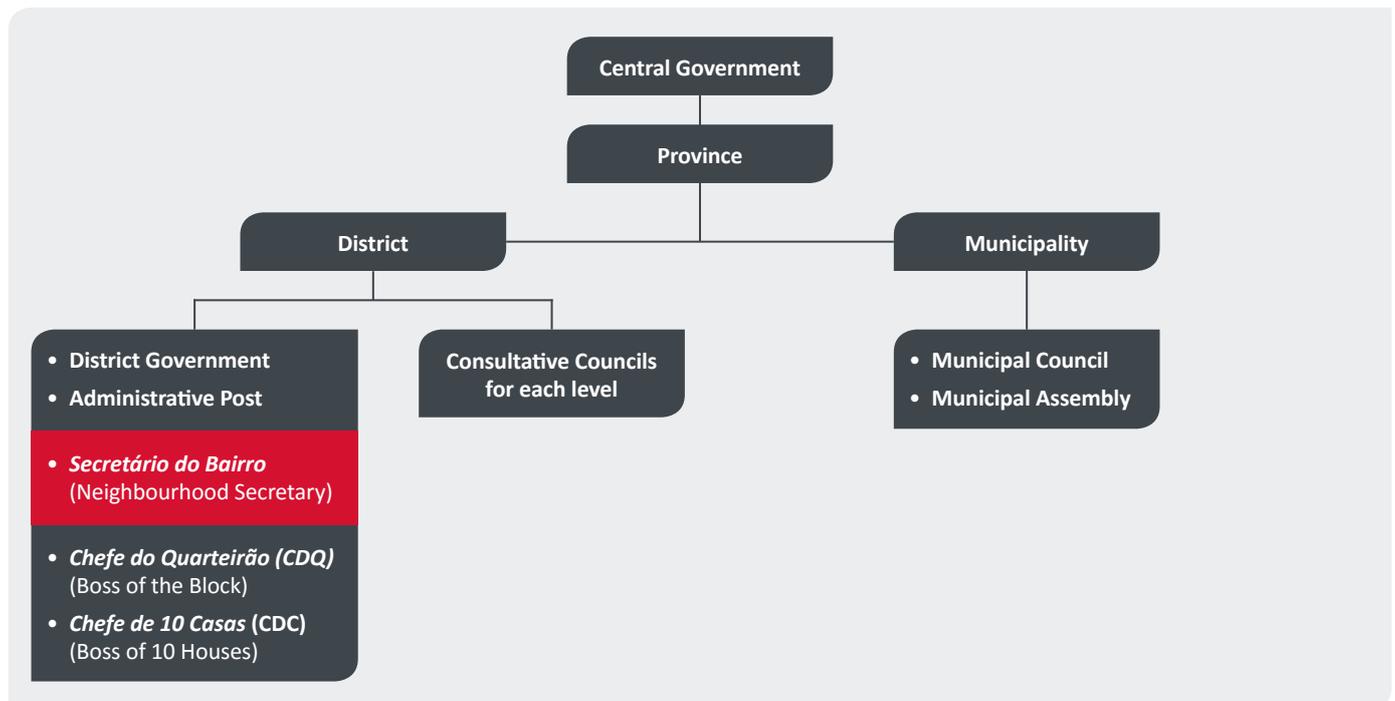
Usually there is also a leader for every 10 houses, the *chefe de 10 casas* (CDC). The CDC will report to the leader of the block, the *chefe do quarteirão* (CDQ) who in turn feeds all information about the neighbourhood to the SDB. When volunteers wish to take up an activity or have an idea for an intervention within their community, they must go through these structures to seek the permission of the SDB. The system of governance is very hierarchical and although the SDB is elected, they are often affiliated with the ruling party although this can vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood. Central to this particular inquiry is the volunteers' relationship with this stakeholder. The impact that this stakeholder and the process of authorisation can have on how community volunteers are able to operate is considered.

Community church volunteers

The volunteers at the centre of the inquiry are a group of church-based *activistas* and volunteers. The differences in the terminology and roles of *activistas* and volunteers will be discussed in Findings section 4.1. The volunteers are linked to a large network of other similar groups through the church, but the current research process engaged most consistently with a small core group of three individuals.

The volunteers are part of a youth group, focused primarily on raising awareness about HIV and sexual health, and some public health issues such as malaria and cholera. The group are well educated and active. Many have attended several government-funded or donor-funded trainings provided for other specific projects. When there is a major debate or activity that the group want to conduct they will apply for funding from the church. Besides this, there is no capacity building or support in place for the group.

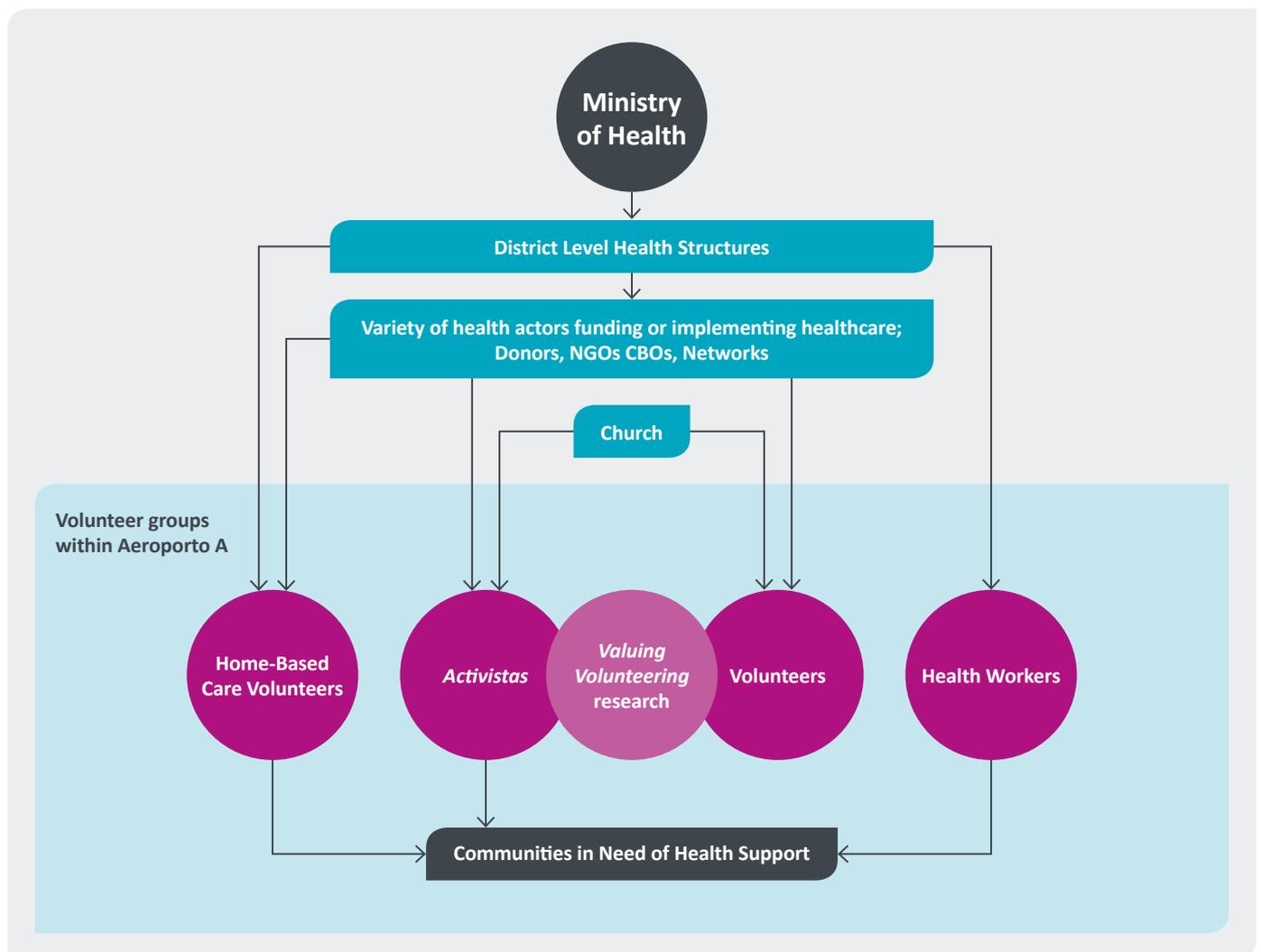
Figure 2. Local governance structure



Health system

Figure 3 provides a broad overview of the institutional layout that underpins the health system in Aeroporto A, and the place of volunteers within this, as described by the *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique* Aeroporto inquiry participants. The arrows indicate the stakeholders that mobilise different types of volunteers and, in some cases, provide them with support and resources, i.e. training and/or financial subsidies. In the case of Aeroporto A, volunteers and *activistas* are recruited and mobilised by the church, although some of them may have received training from formal health actors (e.g. donors, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs)). The grey circle indicates the volunteering space being investigated in this inquiry. The terms *activista* and volunteer are often used interchangeably in the Mozambican context but are typically understood to refer to two different types of volunteering. The church-based volunteer group at the centre of this inquiry is composed of both *activistas* and volunteers.

Figure 3. Where volunteers and *activistas* are placed within the health system in Aeroporto A

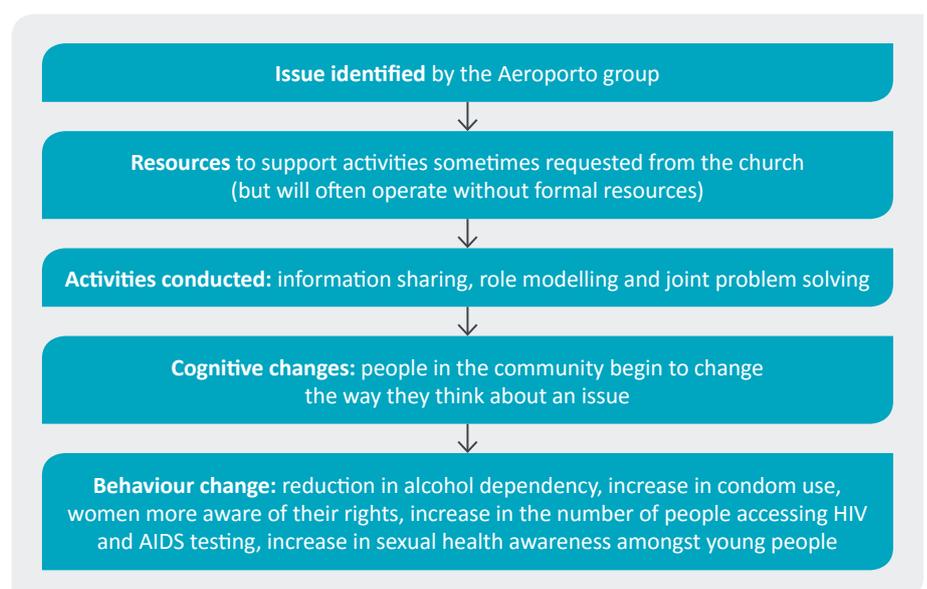


2. Theory of change

Because the Aeroporto group operates outside formal local governance structures and is not associated with donor-funded projects; it does not necessarily operate to one specific or clearly identified theory of change. Part of the focus of this inquiry was therefore to explore the different roles being undertaken by volunteers and *activistas* and the changes that they perceived these activities to be contributing to. Figure 4 represents the Aeroporto group's perceived theory of change.

This inquiry enabled volunteers to then identify some of the barriers to volunteers carrying out these roles effectively. By doing so they were challenging some of the underlying assumptions that underpin their theory of change. For example, missing from Figure 4 is any indication of a partnership with the SDB, a factor which often determined whether volunteers had the necessary permissions or support to operate effectively within the community, but which this case study found was often lacking as it was difficult for volunteers to gain the trust of the SDB and develop this relationship. This inquiry did not have the scope to explore the extent to which the perceived changes identified by volunteers and community members had been successfully achieved and this is something that it would be good to explore in a future inquiry. However, the action phases of this inquiry did look at how the Aeroporto group could build relationships of trust with the community (through strengthening their relationship with the SDB) and strengthen community engagement in identifying the issues and potential solutions.

Figure 4. Theory-of-change diagram from community church *activistas*



3. Methodology

The *Valuing Volunteering* project used two research approaches to collect and analyse insights about volunteering: Participatory Systemic Inquiries (PSI) and Participatory Systemic Action Research (PSAR). Both these approaches enable us to get under the surface of how communities operate and how change happens.

Participatory Systemic Inquiries (PSI) allow a system of actors, actions and contexts to be mapped as a baseline against which change can be assessed (Burns, 2012). When identifying the starting points (our baseline) for a project we might typically record those factors that have an obvious direct relation to our intervention. For example, if our aim is to increase girls' access to education, a 'traditional' baseline might record factors such as school enrolment, attendance and participation. PSI allows us to go deeper and reflect on how people, processes and the environment that they are situated within influence one another and the path to change. Doing this involves asking both broad and detailed questions which take us beyond the school walls and into the complexities of social systems such as, 'Are girls supported by their family and the wider community to attend school?' 'What are the power dynamics within the community and how might these influence girls' attendance in school?'

This data is then used to determine how different factors affect one another, with the aim of learning about why change is or is not happening. While causal links between each part of a system can be identified, they are frequently not linear relationships. By allowing us to observe volunteer practices as part of a wider system rather than in isolation, PSI challenges our assumption that if we do x it will automatically lead to y and forces us to consider each intervention within the context in which it is taking place. For example, strengthening our understanding of the factors that impact on people's perceptions of volunteering was important in some inquiries to make sense of volunteers' effectiveness. A PSI mapping and analysis might take place over a 2–12-week period and can involve working with many different individuals and groups. In the *Valuing Volunteering* project we ran many different PSIs at the community, organisational and national levels. Where actors were motivated to respond to emergent findings, PSI formed the beginning of an action research process.

Participatory Systemic Action Research (PSAR) is an action research methodology which embeds reflection, planning, action and evaluation into a single process. The core principle behind action research is that we learn at least as much from action as from analysis. It incorporates iterative cycles of action and analysis, allowing us to reflect at intervals on a particular action or approach and adapt it according to what we've learnt. The action research used by *Valuing Volunteering* was participatory because it was led by individuals directly affected by or involved in volunteering for development initiatives, and they defined the action research process and questions. It was systemic because we assessed the impact of these actions by considering the knock-on effects for the actors, actions and contexts comprising the wider social system. SAR typically takes place over a period of 18 months to three years.

This inquiry began broadly and without specific sub-questions, developing in an organic way in order to investigate emerging issues. The church-based community volunteer group at the centre of the inquiry was involved throughout the research, and showed commitment and enthusiasm. The inquiry successfully achieved one phase of action and embarked on a second phase.

An overview of the inquiry is outlined in Table 1. More depth will be provided where necessary throughout the document.

Initial SAR training

The inquiry began with an exploratory workshop and SAR training with a group of 8–10 community youth church volunteers. The workshop and training was designed to increase the group's understanding of SAR, incentivise participation in the research and begin an exploratory mapping session. The exploratory mapping involved a series of problem trees, thought showers and focused group discussions. The aim was to understand the group's perceptions of volunteering, the ways that the group worked to address problems in their neighbourhood and to understand some of the elements that facilitated their work or created barriers in their volunteer activities.

Following the practical training in SAR, exploratory community inquiries took place focused on general community perceptions of volunteering and its impacts (these are explored in the Findings section of the case study). Thereafter the group were trained in and undertook systemic mapping. This is a paper mapping activity that draws out emergent issues, themes and questions by mapping information obtained from different stakeholders, as well as factual information and observational data. The process facilitates joint sense making and illuminates emergent themes and areas for further investigation. The strongest emergent finding from the mapping activity was that 'volunteers and *activistas* are more recognised in schools and hospitals'. This was taken forward as the central issue around which the group undertook a causal mapping exercise. Causal mapping is a process to understand the factors that cause the central issues that have been illuminated in the systemic mapping phase. In this instance, causal mapping was used to understand why volunteers and *activistas* are more recognised by the general community in formal service delivery institutions, as opposed to more informal settings such as within the community.

Table 1. Methodological steps

Activity	Participants	Timeline
Initial training in SAR – including exploratory workshop followed by independent community inquiries, systemic analysis and causal maps	Larger volunteer group 8–10 participants	<i>Valuing Volunteering Mozambique</i> year 1: November 2012–July 2013
Collaborative workshop – sharing of all findings from all participants involved in <i>Valuing Volunteering Mozambique</i> to date, to test for resonance	30 participants from different groups and organisations	
Valuing Volunteering researcher exploratory community inquiry utilising a wide variety of participatory methods (this did not include the volunteer peer research group)	<i>Valuing Volunteering Mozambique</i>	
Venn diagrams with community church volunteer group (relationships-focused)	Smaller group of 3 core volunteers	
Community mapping and interaction description sheets with youths supported by the church volunteers	5 youths and 2 of the core <i>activistas</i>	
Action planning: based on all of the above	3 core volunteers plus relevant community groups they consulted	<i>Valuing Volunteering Mozambique</i> year 2: July 2013–May 2014
Action phase 1: initiating a relationship with the SDB		
Action phase 2: working with the SDB network Peer Research Qualitative Techniques Training – focused on primary issues in the neighbourhood		
Peer research inquiry: Main problems in the neighbourhood		
Peer research mapping analysis and planning		

The collaborative workshop

The collaborative workshop was a one-day event conducted after several months of exploration with various groups of volunteers in different locations in or near Maputo. The groups were invited alongside various key volunteer stakeholders, such as United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the National Volunteer Council (Conselho Nacional do Voluntariado (CNV)), VSO and the Mozambican Red Cross. There were approximately 30 participants. This was a large collaborative workshop, bringing together stakeholders to test the resonance of emerging findings from the different inquiries. The collaborative event included: problem rankings regarding the problems faced by volunteers; a world cafe event to test and explore the terminology and conceptualisation of volunteering in Mozambique; feedback on the process of *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique*; and exploration of the causes and effects of the most prominent problems chosen by the group. Four main problems for volunteers and *activistas* were chosen and a cause-and-effect tree was developed around these. In addition, during this workshop a Venn activity was undertaken to understand the different stakeholders who were currently involved with these volunteer issues, and who could be involved in trying to respond to them.

One of the major problems emerging from this workshop concerned volunteers' relationships with local governance structures. These local structures are outlined below. How the quality of relationships with local governance structures can act as a barrier to volunteer effectiveness is discussed in depth throughout this case study. This is the area around which the church-based *activista* group also chose to focus their action phase.

Exploratory community inquiry

The *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique* researcher undertook an exploratory community inquiry in and around the area where the volunteer group works, Aeroporto A. This inquiry aimed to gain resonance regarding the work done so far with the group. In particular, it aimed to understand whether the group's perceptions of the general problems facing their neighbourhood and who responds to these were shared by community members outside the volunteer group. This activity was also useful in illuminating how the general community viewed volunteering, and to consolidate what was found in the SAR training inquiries. It helped to show how different people and organisations in the community viewed the responses made by volunteers.

The inquiry was conducted over a period of four days. Social relationship maps, problem walls and solution trees, community mapping, one-to-one interviews, informal discussions and focus group discussions were undertaken at this stage. Stakeholders included neighbourhood residents, hospital staff, hospital volunteers, NGO staff and volunteers, pupils from two different secondary schools, *activistas* and volunteers from the schools, teachers, primary school staff and *activistas*.

Based on the SAR community training with the *Valuing Volunteering* researcher and the exploratory community inquiries, a systems map was developed.

Figure 6. Community map



The action phases

In the action phase, the volunteer group tried to improve their working relationship with the SDB (this is detailed in Findings section 4). They decided that they would like to undertake peer research using the SAR approach to understand the problems faced by the community and to develop a plan to respond to these. This involved a participatory methods training session each week and then a data collection session run by the three volunteers in the community with different groups. This is described in more detail later in the report. Having improved their understanding of the key issues in the neighbourhood, and developed a plan to respond, the *activistas* aimed to then take this to the SDB to gain his support. The process helped to ensure the volunteer responses were rooted in community research. System maps were developed after each peer research session.

After conducting the peer research with the community, the three volunteers came together to conduct a sense-making session, where the systems maps produced at the end of each weekly data collection session were analysed collectively. They extracted the recurring main problems that came out of each of the maps from different stakeholder groups. They found that the main problems in the neighbourhood were related to: lack of education, unemployment, HIV and AIDS, lack of responses to the problems by the local governance structures and domestic violence. They then voted that unemployment was the biggest issue and created a causal map. Gender was perceived to be a key factor that contributed to unemployment. The volunteers saw a lack of gender equality as a root cause of many of the other problems expressed. It was also the

issue they felt they had the capacity to respond to as a group, unlike the issue of corruption and local governance structures, which was seen to be too big to affect as a group of volunteers. As a result, a plan was created that would respond to the issue of gender.

However, following this session, the volunteers' work and study commitments made it difficult for them to maintain participation in the research. At this point the work with this group came to a natural end and so a detailed plan of how to respond to gender inequality was not created or submitted to the SDB.

List of collection methods and participants

Data collection methods included: exploratory community inquiries, informal discussions, problem analysis, cause-and-effect diagrams, stakeholder mappings, social relationship diagrams, interaction description sheets, one-to-one semi-structured interviews, world cafe, wellbeing mapping, focused group discussions, solution trees, tree of effects diagrams, participatory and qualitative data collection and recording trainings, participatory systemic mapping and analysis, problem rankings and more.

Participants included: general community members, primary and secondary school staff, secondary pupils, *activistas* and volunteers from schools and hospitals, hospital staff, community members supported by *activistas* and volunteers, SDB, women's groups, youth groups, bosses of the housing block (CDQs), NGO staff, *activistas* and community church volunteers.

4. Findings

This SAR approach allowed the volunteers at the centre of the inquiry to explore and understand in more depth the volunteering landscape in which they were operating; their roles and their theory of change; the impact they were having and the issues that were affecting this impact. In sections 4.1–4.4 below, insights are shared from the exploratory phases of the inquiry where volunteers (along with other stakeholders) observed and reflected on their experiences. In sections 4.5 and 4.6, the action phase of the SAR approach is described, and key learning regarding both the specific volunteering context at the centre of this inquiry, and process learning in terms of utilising a SAR approach are shared.

4.1 Understanding the volunteering context

In the first stages of the SAR process, inquiries were undertaken with volunteers and key stakeholders in the volunteering sector to understand the volunteering context. Specifically, the different meanings and roles associated with the terms *activista* and volunteer were explored. The differences and the implications of having different types of volunteers working within the same ‘ecosystem’ are outlined below.

Understanding the volunteer context

The first stages of the SAR inquiry were undertaken with the eight to ten community youth volunteers (divided equally between males and females) who attended the SAR training and workshop.¹ An activity was undertaken to understand the types of volunteers operating in the community and the terminology used to describe them.

The group defined themselves as a mixture of volunteers and *activistas*. An *activista* is generally and simplistically considered a volunteer who has had training and receives a subsidy. At the time of the activity, none of the individuals in the group received subsidies and although the majority had received training, they were not currently working in an area related to this.

The perspectives of the volunteer group and the wider community in terms of the different types of volunteer (i.e. *activista* and volunteer) were gathered. The activity with the volunteer group involved testing the resonance of a diagram created by a volunteer group in a different research site that revealed perceptions of the two roles (Figure 7).

The volunteer group made a number of clarifications to the diagram they were presented with during the activity, demonstrating the different meanings and connotations associated with the two terminologies in different contexts. Their clarifications included:

The scope of *activistas*: the group felt that *activistas* are not just concerned with dealing with issues related to achieving basic needs and that their remit is wider.

Pay: the group clarified that *activistas* do not necessarily receive payment but will receive a subsidy to cover costs such as transport.

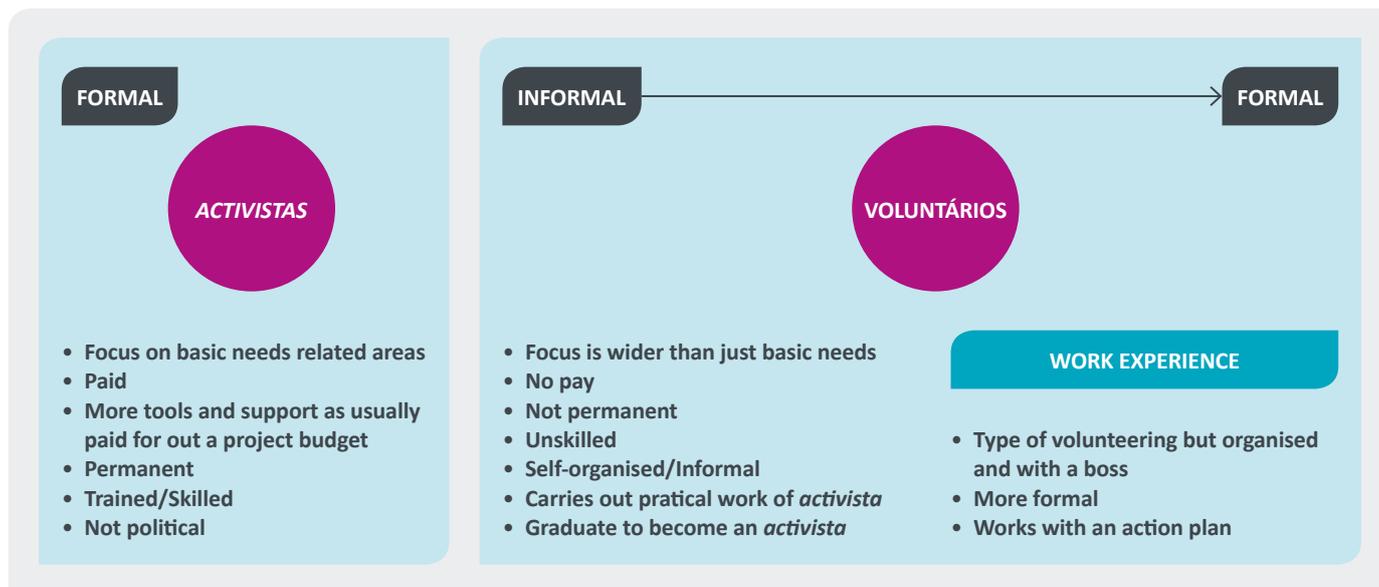
Structure: group participants added that ‘Work Experience’ volunteers ‘work with an action plan’.

Permanency: some participants stated that the work of an *activista* is not permanent and will finish when the project is finished. Other participants felt that the *activista* role is more permanent because even when the project has finished and there are no specific activities to undertake, an *activista* identity remains and is maintained. In this sense, activism is something internal, linked to a sense of identity, and carried with you. There was a permanency associated with this role which is linked to motivations. This may have implications also for the sustainability of volunteer interventions.

Role: participants felt that the role of the *activista* is to find out information and to think of solutions, but is not necessarily associated with undertaking practical tasks to resolve the problem. Participants added to the diagram, stating that *activistas* ‘look for information in the community and help find solutions’ – suggesting that they are proactive in their way of working. The work of the volunteer is to carry out the practical tasks that the *activista* has planned. As a result, the volunteer may be less permanent because they are only required to complete specific tasks. They perhaps have less ownership over the process, and therefore when their tasks are finished they have no further work to do. Some participants felt that the volunteer term isn’t associated with a sense of identity in the way that *activista* is, and therefore volunteers may be more temporary.

1. Following the training the group reduced to three members who continued the process.

Figure 7. *Activista* and volunteer mapping created by the Aeroporto group



Politics: the participants did not perceive that the activities of the *activistas* were aligned with a particular political party. They did state that sometimes the *activistas* would ‘work with the government’. This was perceived as being an apolitical act which did not involve showing affiliation to a particular party. However, the group also highlighted that it is possible to be party politically affiliated in your work as a volunteer.

This activity highlighted the similarities and differences between the perspectives of participants across different *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique* inquiry sites. In this context, the community church volunteers’ views of the permanency, motivations, role and level of politicisation of volunteers and *activistas* were different. In summary, the community church volunteers felt that the volunteer’s role is more practical and less permanent than the *activista*’s. Interestingly, the participants felt that the *activista* role was more strongly associated with an individual’s sense of identity, whereas the volunteer internalised their role to a lesser degree. The *activista* devises solutions to problems which the volunteer practically implements. These aspects imply a hierarchy between the two roles, whereby the volunteer holds a lower ‘status’ than the *activista*. It is interesting to note that the church-based community volunteer group, despite being comprised of volunteers and *activistas*, wanted to be referred to as *activistas*. For the remainder of the report they will be referred to as such.

Community perspectives of volunteer roles and activities

The *Valuing Volunteering Mozambique* researcher undertook an exploratory community inquiry in the locality where the volunteer group are active in order to gain broader understanding of the roles of volunteers and *activistas*, and to compare these with the perspectives of the volunteer group. These are some of the different ways in which individuals or groups understood the roles and activities of the volunteers and *activistas*. There were a range of responses:

“They are 12–16 [years] and they will carry out work around the school on issues such as HIV and drugs.”

Volunteer coordinator of school-based volunteers

“Volunteer is someone who does work without receiving, an *activista* is usually trained and has more respect in the community.”

Hospital *activista*

“The *activista* and volunteer will usually get a small subsidy to cover calls, etc. and will usually focus on sensitisation in the community.”

Local NGO director

“Volunteer and *activista* is the same thing but *activistas* receive training.”

Local NGO *activista*

“A volunteer will usually work alone but *activistas* work in groups. Both do the same work and neither receives a salary. Volunteers can work for different organisations and can leave but the *activista* will usually work for one organisation and stay.”

Primary school *activista*

The exploratory community inquiry showed convergence between the volunteer group’s perspectives and those of the wider community regarding subsidies, training and permanency of the *activista*. The NGO perspective was slightly different in that the volunteers and *activistas* are perceived to be the same, with subsidies and training given to both.

Conclusion

The activity during the SAR workshop and training, and subsequent community inquiries, enabled meanings associated with volunteer and *activista* roles to be explored, and perceptions to be compared both between different research sites and between different stakeholders in the community.

This process provided in-depth insights into the local volunteering context. A subtle hierarchy within the terminology was revealed whereby the *activistas* see themselves occupying a slightly elevated position in relation to the volunteers. This may be both the result of, and reinforced by, the fact that *activistas* are more likely to receive a subsidy. This is further underpinned by the types of roles that *activistas* and volunteers undertake, with the *activista* undertaking diagnostic and problem-solving activities, whilst the volunteer carries out the practical tasks. Interestingly, NGO stakeholders perceived there was less difference between the volunteer and *activista* roles. This suggests that they are not fully accounting for the potential hierarchies that the differences in terminology and the benefits and opportunities associated with the *activista* role might create.

Implications

- The subsidies, training and type of role associated with the *activista* term may create competition within the volunteer 'ecosystem', with individuals eager to access the benefits and opportunities that being an *activista* may bring.
- If the differences between volunteers and *activistas* are not recognised formally by the volunteer sector then the potential hierarchy between the two may go unnoticed, as well as any competition which could lead to further tensions.

4.2 How are volunteers addressing community needs?

Issues affecting the local community

Volunteers' views on community issues were discussed at various stages of the SAR process. Additionally, during the *Valuing Volunteering* researcher-led exploratory community inquiry a wide variety of community stakeholders were included and their perspectives on community issues and problems collected. Table 2 is a summary table containing both church-based *activista* and community members' perspectives of the problems faced by their community.

Table 2. Perceptions of community problems

Community perspectives	Church <i>activista</i> perspectives
Drugs and alcohol	Taboos and myths
Personal safety	Traditional beliefs
Poor-quality education	Illiteracy
Lack of access to information	Language barriers
	Lack of access to information
Child abuse, trafficking	
Poor environmental sanitation	
HIV	
Domestic violence	
Sexually active at young age including transactional sex	Sexual health practices
Teenage pregnancy	
Lack of food for sick and orphaned and vulnerable children	
Sexual abuse in schools	
Grandparent-headed households – vulnerability of children under their care	
Malaria, cholera, TB, diarrhoea	

The green boxes show the areas of convergence between community and church *activista* perspectives – these include illiteracy and a lack of access to information. Sexual behaviour and its associated problems (e.g. teenage pregnancy and early sexual activity) could also be said to align with, or result from, some of the issues such as traditional beliefs regarding the role of women. These examples show that the issues raised by the community do resonate with those identified by the church *activistas*.

How volunteers are responding to community issues

The church *activistas* work mainly through awareness raising, information giving, debates and counselling in schools and church. In addition they conduct door-to-door visits, and use music, film or theatre to share information. Counselling, which the volunteers call 'skills for life' and is focused on good decision-making (in particular regarding contraception), is also provided by volunteers.

A thought shower activity with the church-based *activista* group explored the ways volunteers felt they could affect these issues, and the pathway to change that was required. This activity allowed the group to reflect on their theory of change with regard to impacting on poverty in the community.

The group were presented with a sheet with the words '*activista*' and 'poverty'. One member of the group wrote beside each of the words as shown below:



The participant felt that if the *activistas* are more efficient then poverty will be reduced. This would happen by changing attitudes that are designed to make people poorer and improving access to information.

The *activistas* felt that they contributed to change through role-modelling, information sharing and joint problem solving. Being **role models** was felt to be important because they needed to model proactive behaviour in order to change attitudes that cause poverty. One *activista* describes this role: “[They can’t just say] do as I say but not as I do” (Church *activista*). In his view the *activistas* will “change these attitudes by making people more proactive in their lives so that for example they can take the initiative... so they don’t just have to rely on the government for everything. Further, that the *activista* will help to **pass on information** to society about how to make the changes and will help them think about how and where they can get the resources. They will help to **solve problems jointly** with the poor and will have practical suggestions on how to change things” (ibid.).

The *Valuing Volunteering* researcher-led exploratory community inquiries incorporated a broader range of views regarding the role of volunteers (generally) in the community. The types of activities that the community most commonly perceived as being undertaken by volunteers and *activistas* were:

Information sharing and knowledge strengthening: through door-to-door visits, song, dance, film, debates, fundraising, teaching, fairs and exhibitions

Counselling

Linking with formal services and structures: linking to hospital services, giving information to local government on the numbers of individuals in the community suffering from illness, accompanying individuals to hospital, administering certain treatments, providing medication support

Mobilising and campaigning on health issues

Home-based support visits

One point of divergence between *activistas*' and volunteers' descriptions of their roles is that the practical types of support, such as home support and 'linking' with local structures or formal services, are functions less prominently undertaken by *activistas*. The linkage role applies more to other hospital-based and school-based volunteers functioning in the same area, and is associated with social provision provided by more formal institutions. Those in the community interacting with volunteers and receiving support from them do not therefore draw the same distinctions between service providers. This raises an interesting point, worth exploring in future inquiries, about whether individuals' awareness at community level of which volunteers are carrying out which tasks has an impact on the volunteers' ability to be effective in their role. For example, is there a risk of duplication of activities, or does it create an imbalance when it comes to which volunteers receive recognition for the work that they do, and how might this impact on the volunteer's motivations and wellbeing?

Impact of volunteer responses to community needs

Based on church *activista* and community perspectives, information sharing emerged as one of the main pathways of change used by *activistas* to address community needs. But are these impacts felt in the wider community? It is important to explore the impact of the church *activistas* to understand whether they are in fact meeting the needs felt by the community in the ways outlined above. The case study will also explore the barriers highlighted in the diagram above, in sections 3 and 4 below.

The youths with whom the volunteers undertake information-sharing activities in order to effect cognitive and behavioural change sum up the volunteers' impact. They all highlighted how they were counselled and informed by the *activistas* in order to change the way they perceived certain problems or situations in their lives. One young person described how the information provided had “liquidated all of the doubts” that they had about sexual health issues (Youth receiving *activista* support). Another stated that the *activistas* helped to “increase my knowledge”, and the changes this brought were affirmed by one youth who stated that “I changed the habits” as a result of receiving the *activista* support (Youths receiving *activista* support).

The young people unanimously agreed that the *activistas*' work was sustainable. They explained that the changes in their behaviour or knowledge would last because “the *activista* was able to pass information” (Youth receiving *activista* support) and “it will be long lasting because, once I already obtained the information I will not stay with the same [behaviour or knowledge], I will convey the same to others for this it will be long lasting” (Youth receiving *activista* support). Those supported by the community *activistas* believe that the information and counselling received from the *activistas* has had an important and sustainable impact on their knowledge and behaviour.

These youth perspectives were added to by the *Valuing Volunteering* researcher-led community exploratory inquiry, which incorporated a wide variety of community perspectives on volunteer impact. The key ways that the community felt volunteers and *activistas* were effecting change are summarised below:

- **Behaviour changes:** alcohol and drug use reduces, mothers' childcare improves, discipline at school improves, women accessing literacy classes, positive changes to health practices
- **Cognitive changes:** people change the way they think
- **Utilisation of formal services:** support in home to access hospital services, links to the local community leader or legal system
- **Survival:** "with the *activista* by their side people live" (Hospital *activista*)

Whilst these testimonies came from a variety of different sources, this inquiry did not have the opportunity to explore the extent to which the above changes had indeed taken place within the community or whether they were largely based on communities' assumptions about what sorts of changes they had expected to see as a result of the volunteers' activities.

When *activistas* were asked what sorts of changes they expected to see as a result of their activities they listed the following:

- changes in behaviour
- breaking myths and taboos
- making a confident and safe community free of infections and HIV and AIDS
- encouraging condom use
- motivating change within the community
- providing information
- gaining information, knowledge and skills through volunteering

Conclusion

Community church volunteers are attempting to address community needs through information sharing, role modelling and behaviour change. They focus on trying to address sexual health and some other wider health issues by undertaking these roles. Testimonies gathered from young people, community members and the volunteers illustrate the types of roles undertaken by volunteers and *activistas* in this area and suggest that they are in fact helping to address a need in the community. Young people directly supported by the volunteers highlighted that they have experienced cognitive and behavioural changes around these areas and felt that these changes are sustainable. This is reinforced through other stakeholder perspectives in the wider community about the role of volunteers. Although it is notoriously hard to prove behaviour change regarding sensitisation and awareness raising on sexual health practices, a future inquiry could review these testimonies against evidence of changes in health-seeking behaviour.

Implications

- Sensitisation and information sharing are important, but the impact of this method on community issues is difficult to gauge.
- Volunteer and *activista* groups focusing on sensitisation and access to information around health issues should develop systems to measure the impacts they are having and the sustainability of these interventions.
- If volunteer resource providers plan to build capacity with this type of volunteer, it would be advisable to try to design these impact measures collaboratively with volunteers.

4.3 Improving access to information and communication

General literacy rates and access to information are very low in Mozambique. Furthermore, only 6.5% of the population speak Portuguese as their mother tongue and only 39% speak Portuguese at all (Open Society Institute Network 2009). These issues make the distribution of information at the individual, household and community levels, and the role of *activistas* in facilitating this, even more important. At the same time, low education levels and multiple language issues also affect the ability of volunteers to affect change in this area, presenting major challenges to improving access to information.

Language and communication barriers

Discussion took place with the church-based *activistas* regarding what they considered to be their most important role in addressing community needs. It was agreed that the real power lies in that they, first and foremost, help facilitate information access. It is evident that they believe information sharing to be their most important role in addressing community public health problems.

However, a problem analysis conducted with the volunteers revealed that a significant barrier is imposed between them and the community by language and/or communication difficulties. Given that a large part of the work undertaken by the group is related to sensitisation and information sharing, this is a significant issue for the *activistas* and influences the impacts they have on community health problems. Some of the key barriers to communication which they expressed were:

- **language differences** between the *activistas*, who often speak Portuguese as their primary language, and those in the community who speak local languages
- **low literacy levels** in the area which mean that communication and written messaging might not always be received
- **community attitudes** that make *activistas* feel unaccepted in the community, which makes it difficult to communicate with community members and share information.

Conclusion

Language, literacy and community attitudes towards the volunteers impact on their ability to address community needs through their information-sharing activities at the local level. Community church *activistas'* method of addressing community problems is addressing the issue of a lack of access to information. However, some of the poorest in the community, who may be most in need of accessing this information, may not be reached by such interventions unless their language differences and literacy level are taken into account.

Implications

- In contexts where literacy rates are low, and there are issues around multiple languages and access to information, the information-sharing, community-level sensitisation role that volunteers undertake may be very important, yet difficult due to the very problems it is trying to address. Language issues and low literacy rates should be carefully considered at the design stage.
- Combinations of different communications methods that do not purely rely on language or literacy abilities are crucial in this context for information sharing to be an effective method for creating health changes in the community.

4.4 Volunteers' relationship with local governance structures and its impact on their effectiveness

The functions and importance of different types of relationships in addressing community problems emerged strongly in this inquiry. This was explored using a variety of methods including a relationship-mapping activity and exploratory community inquiries undertaken by the larger *activista* group as part of the methodological training sessions. These methods revealed that volunteers associated with formal local service delivery structures and institutions (e.g. the hospital, school) were seen as more influential and as having more impact than community volunteers such as the church *activistas*. The reasons volunteer impact is associated with formal institutions, and the implications of this for the church *activistas* in their attempts to address community health needs are explored below.

Why is volunteer impact associated with formal institutions?

The *activista*-led exploratory community inquiries (undertaken during the initial SAR training), revealed that volunteers' presence is being felt more in formalised establishments (such as schools and hospitals). The strongest finding that surfaced in the community inquiries training was that "The major impact of volunteers is in the schools and hospitals and is less in the communities".

Causal mapping with *activistas* based on the data generated by the exploratory community inquiries was undertaken to understand why the impact of volunteers was more associated with formal structures of service delivery and why schools and hospitals have more volunteers and *activistas* than the community does. During this activity, the issue of the support of local structures (i.e. local governance structures including the SDB) emerged as an important barrier to *activista* and volunteer work. *Activistas* felt that support from local governance structures facilitated the delivery of local services, but could be a significant barrier if this support was missing.

The importance of local governance structures also emerged during the relationships-mapping activity with the church-based volunteers. The exercise revealed the importance of the SDB's permission-giving role in the volunteer and health service delivery system. The SDB is portrayed as having medium importance, but relatively strong influence in the system with regard to health support. A key aspect of this influence is derived from the necessity to gain consent from the SDB in order for some volunteers to conduct activities. For example, the hospital *activistas* require permission from the SDB, in addition to permission from the hospital, in order to conduct volunteer activities.

The SDB's influence in relation to the church and its *activistas* is complex. The church does not have the same permission-requesting/information-sharing relationship with the SDB as the hospital and school. Thus the church *activistas* operate more informally in the system, and could be described as an 'outsider' group. The church was said to have a relationship of trust with the SDB during the relationship-mapping exercise. *Activistas* felt that this derived from a widely held perception that the church is well intentioned and does 'good things', making it difficult to question it as having 'bad motives'. However, although the SDB has confidence in the church as an institution, the *activistas* felt that this applied only to individuals at the top of the church hierarchy. The *activista* group stated that they themselves "receive no trust from the SDB".

The church *activistas* describe their relationship with local governance structures:

"Weak collaboration by the local structures"

"Lack of initiative and sensitivity on the part of local structures"

"Lack of support from the local structures meaning not given a space to meet"

In particular, the church-based *activistas* described their relationship with the SDB as 'challenging'. This extract from an *activista* describes this relationship and reveals how the lack of trust between *activista* and SDB can act as a real barrier to delivering services:

'The *secretário do bairro* always puts up barriers to stop us from doing things. We will need to provide many many justifications for why we want to do something, the *secretário do bairro* may say yes to a meeting or a plan we have and then he will often say there is another activity on the day we had scheduled the activity and then we have to cancel. We will also have to provide a great deal of credentials and paperwork to prove that we have good intentions.'

Community church *activista*

Why is there a lack of collaboration between local governance structures and 'informal' volunteers?

There were a range of reasons identified for the lack of support given to the *activistas* by local governance structures. For example:

- local structures' lack of confidence in the *activistas*
- perceptions that *activistas* are not transparent in their objectives
- local structures thinking that *activistas* are doing political work and receiving a stipend (which they are not)
- lack of credibility in the eyes of the local structures
- local structures thinking that *activistas* are not serious

One *activista* said: "[We are] devalued and [have] low credibility in the eyes of the local structure. They don't recognise the importance of the *activistas*." (Church *activista*)

An in-depth session with *activistas* on the issue of the relationship with local governance structures and its impact revealed that politics may be at the centre of this fractious relationship. One *activista* described how political allegiance affects whether volunteers are endorsed by local governance structures:

“it is all about politics. When young people want to do something in the bairro and they are outside the... party they will always think you are from the other parties and are trying to create espionage. People will not trust you. You need someone to represent you that they trust for them to believe that you don't have political intentions. It is especially difficult at this time of the elections for young people from outside the party to do things in the bairro. When you have the permission of the *secretário do bairro* you then get the permission of the *chefe do quarteirão* and then the people in the community will trust you and you will be able to work with them”.

Community church *activista*

This extract suggests that in order to gain the trust of the SDB (and the community), the volunteers are required to demonstrate that they do not intend to challenge the local ruling political elites.

How are volunteers affected by the lack of support from local governance structures?

Without endorsement and support from local governance structures, the volunteers and *activistas* remain outsiders to the system of health service delivery. *Activistas* summarised the effects of not having the support of the local structures:

- lack of space for the *activistas* to meet
- lack of support from the community
- local structures don't know about the impacts that *activistas* have in the community
- diminish the value of *activistas*
- lack of recognition by the community of the work of *activistas*
- difficult and not possible to achieve objectives
- lack of collaborative work
- lack of community involvement
- don't have transparent objectives known by the community
- wasted time

As pointed out above, this has particular implications for their relationship with local communities. *Activistas* believe more trust is felt by the community towards volunteers and *activistas* if they are conducting activities through formalised, centrally run organisations or structures such as schools and hospitals. Government-supported organisations are seen to be more trustworthy and acceptable than others that people do not know the origin of. *Activistas* felt that “the community do not believe in the sincerity of the *activistas*” (Church *activista*) even though “the [local] institutions recognise the role the *activistas* play” (ibid.).

This is linked to the political context. As one *activista* noted: “Politics creates distrust of community *activistas*” (Church *activista*). Those seen to be political are distrusted by the community, and because volunteers and *activistas* aren't attached to government-supported establishments and are therefore less recognised and trusted, their motives are more likely to be questioned.

The fact that, during exploratory community inquiries, a strong finding was that community members perceived hospital and school *activistas* to be of greater prominence, seems to be linked to their relationship with local governance structures and the trust that accompanies being associated with those structures. The trust of the SDB, in particular, seems to be significant in gaining the trust of the wider community. One *activista* points out the significance of gaining endorsement from the SDB: “When you have the permission of the *secretário do bairro* you then get the permission of the *chefe do quarteirão* and then the people in the community will trust you and you will be able to work with them” (Community church *activistas*).

In addition, the relationship-mapping activity revealed that volunteers had limited contact with formal institutions such as the school and hospital, showing that they felt slightly distanced from the other (more formal) stakeholders who were responding to health needs in the community, and that communication flows were not regular. Improving the relatively limited communication linkages between *activistas* and these institutions may require *activistas* to work hard to build the trust of, and gain endorsement from, local governance structures. This may involve developing more formalised reporting and permission-seeking types of relationship, and therefore involve assimilating to the formal ‘insider’ systems.

Finally, remaining ‘outsiders’ in the system has important implications for the availability of resources for volunteer activities. *Activistas* felt there were fewer resources and fewer spaces for them to utilise in order to plan and undertake their activities. One explained that “there is more physical space for the *activista* and volunteer to meet” in the school and hospital (Church *activista*).

Conclusion

The inquiries revealed that a more formal 'insider' volunteering system (e.g. school-based and hospital-based volunteers) exists alongside a less formal 'outsider' one (e.g. church-based volunteers). The impact of the more formal insider volunteers was seen to be greater than that of community-based volunteers by community members. The SDB is a very important permission granter and focal point for information about volunteering activities in the neighbourhood. However, actors outside the formal insider system are less likely to be endorsed or supported by the SDB. This may be affected by perceptions that less formal volunteers are party political or motivated to challenge existing political elites. The lack of endorsement from local governance structures can have a major impact on the ability of the volunteers to function at community level, particularly in terms of gaining trust from the local community and gaining access to resources.

Without endorsement from the SDB, the volunteers face barriers in their work. However, trust is often dependent on political allegiances and on not having what are described as 'bad motives'. Volunteers may only be trusted if they are considered to be maintaining, rather than challenging, the status quo, and this may require the volunteers to work in less contentious areas and to assimilate to a more formal permission-giving relationship with local structures.

Implications

- Community volunteering in this context may be highly dependent on the relationship that the volunteers and their sending organisation have with the SDB.
- As relationships which facilitate volunteering appear to be based on trust, perceived motives and formalisation through permission seeking and information sharing with local power holders, volunteer organisations or groups must begin to consider such local-level power dynamics when introducing volunteering programmes or activities.
- Politics may be decreasing the ability of volunteering to reach its full change potential in this community context.
- Community volunteers can only fully function and gain the trust of the community when they show they don't have political motives against the party.
- Supporting informal community volunteers to navigate the local-level relationships and power dynamics necessary for volunteering to take place could be considered by volunteer development organisations.
- Volunteer resource providers need to account for local politics when designing or supporting community volunteer contexts such as this.

4.5 Taking action: initiating a relationship with the *secretário do bairro*

The previous section reveals the effects that a trusting relationship (or the lack of it) can have on the ability of *activistas* to carry out activities that address community needs. In light of this, the church *activista* group decided that relationship building with the SDB should be the focus of the action phase of this research inquiry. This section explores the planning and action phase of the study, highlighting key insights in terms of the specific focus of the inquiry and important process learning from utilising a SAR approach.

Rationale for SDB relationship-building focus

On further exploration with the church-based *activista* group, further justification was provided for focusing on relationship building with the SDB. The *activistas* felt that the relationship, and gaining the support of local structures, was of key importance for them to be able to function: "We are trying to change the thoughts and the way the people in the zone think, we cannot do that without the support of the local structures" (Church *activista*). Gaining this support was crucial in enabling them to gain the community's trust: "[it] is about the better relationships, adherence of the community to the organisational objectives, attainment of community support and that the local structures participate in the activities of the *activistas*, this will help because it will mean more people will attend the activities that the *activistas* organise and that people will have more confidence and belief in them" (ibid.). Moreover, building relationships with local governance structures could facilitate access to resources: "It will also help us to get more resources, not just financial, but also human resources, people will be more willing to help us in a practical way" (ibid.).

The *activistas* felt that gaining recognition and the support of the community had two functions: firstly, it would provide more access to community members and enable them to communicate and work with them; but importantly, it would also help them to work with more confidence. They felt they would have a wider impact and coverage because people would be more willing to listen to them. They would also be able to expand the themes of their work and be able to work in more geographical areas.

In summary, the positive impacts of SDB support were perceived to be: collaborative work; increased credibility; extra recognition and human resources; improved relationships and trust from the local community; and increased coverage/reach.

Moving into the action phase, it was clear that the *activistas* strongly associated improved community relationships (i.e. gaining community members' trust and being seen as credible) with improved relationships with the SDB. The element of trust is interesting and seems very dependent on endorsement by the SDB. However, the trust of the SDB is more difficult to gain because of the political nature of this post, and the distrust felt towards individuals not affiliated to the same party. Here the recurring finding that trusting relationships are of high importance when carrying out community-level volunteer work is intermeshed with party politics. If the volunteer or *activista* is not an insider in the formalised governance system then there may be significant barriers to carrying out volunteering activities.

Action planning to improve relationships with local governance structures

The *activistas* decided that the initial activities needed to improve support from the local governance structures should be broken down into various stages:

1. Make an oral presentation to the SDB.
2. Create and gather documentation to submit to the local structures (including the group's written objectives and their vision). Concurrently contact the SDM to try to organise a meeting.
3. The pastor will be asked to write a reference to support the written documentation for submission.
4. A harmonisation meeting will be conducted with the other church *activistas* to gain consensus on the documents and process

These activities were all conducted. However, the submission of the documents and the referral from the pastor were not necessary as a meeting was planned and conducted without these. Below is the mission statement that the group developed to take to the SDB. This could be considered to be a way of formalising the role and objectives of the group in order to gain the trust of the SDB:

Vision: to turn into a reference organisation for the bairro, not just in matters of civic education and public health

Mission: to help the residents of the neighbourhood and contribute to harmonious development, principally with adolescents and youths, to endow them with information to better their health and wellbeing

Objectives:

- to realise civic education campaigns and promote health
- to make sensitisation campaigns in the area of public health and environment management
- to create exchange and synergies with other organisations that work in the same area
- to coordinate actions in development and dissemination of sustainable practice of solid urban residue

Reflections on taking action

During the action phase the *activistas* completed achievement reports. These were used to document their actions and observations, and are also a method that facilitates reflective learning. Salient points from the reports are highlighted here in order to gain insights from the action phases of the inquiry.

With regard to the mission statement, there was concordance that this helped to give credibility to the group, that it would help the group to be more focused and that it would help them in the long term to be more effective and efficient.

The *activistas* had a preliminary meeting with the SDB prior to a wider joint local structures meeting in order to explain their objectives and desire to work together. After this explanatory meeting the group highlighted that they felt closer to the SDB. The SDB had demonstrated his willingness to be available by granting a preliminary meeting, and had provided access to his network in order to help and support the *activistas*.

The group were then invited to present themselves and their objectives to a wider local structures group who meet weekly in the neighbourhood. This group consists of the different local leadership and community representatives of different branches of the ruling party (OMM is the women's' branch, OJM is the youth movement). During this meeting the group made a formal presentation to all the leaders and representatives. They presented the objectives and the ways in which they hoped to work together with the SDB, stating that they "would like to work with the structures to resolve various problems" (Church *activista*).

The response of the SDB was positive and he was open to future collaborations. The church *activistas* reflected that "it was clear that the SDB has a big expectation in relation to our work and they liked the idea. They said that they will help us, and give us important information in the areas that we are going to work". There appeared to be an openness from the local governance structures to work with the *activistas*; for example, there was an invitation for the group to participate in the frequent community meetings.

A key moment occurred at the end of the meeting, when the SDB made an explicit proposal to the wider leadership within the community to introduce the *activista* group to the OJM. Post-meeting, the group reflected that this would be problematic because they themselves were not politically affiliated and were eager to continue to be seen as unaffiliated by the community. They highlighted that they would have to be very clear, when they took their plans to the SDB, that although they wanted to work collaboratively together and with his network they were not political in any way.

Conclusion

The action phase of the inquiry saw the *activistas* begin to assimilate into the ‘insider system’ by becoming slightly more formalised (e.g. by creating a mission statement) and by communicating and networking with individuals associated with local governance structures (e.g. the formal presentation, the public acceptance and introduction by the SDB and the invitation to have closer links with the OJM).

Moving from the observation and reflection phase of the project to the action phase highlighted some key contradictions and dilemmas for the *activistas*. Progress was made in building relationships with local governance structures, and the SDB showed a supportive attitude towards them which facilitated access to wider networks in the community. However, there may be a flip side to developing a relationship with the SDB because closer links with this political figure may lead the *activistas* to be seen as politically aligned, which has implications for how they are perceived in the neighbourhood. There is a contradiction: on the one hand, building collaborative relationships with key political stakeholders provides endorsement and may allow barriers to be removed in terms of working with the community. On the other hand, these relationships risk compromising the *activistas*’ relative neutrality, making trusting relationships harder to build in the community.

The SAR approach, where the *activistas* were supported in reflecting on their findings, moving to action and then reflecting again on the actions taken, was important in showing that change is not linear. The process reveals that there are often contradictions and dilemmas associated with taking action. Using methods such as the achievement reports allows for the non-linearity of change processes to be observed and for emerging dilemmas to be reflected on and discussed collectively.

Implications

- There may be positive and negative impacts of building a relationship with the local power-holders in this context and these should be considered prior to volunteering activities.
- It might be necessary to try to be clear from the start of the relationship-building process that the volunteer activities proposed are politically neutral.
- It might be detrimental to the volunteer group to begin to build this relationship if they are approximating to a system that they do not agree with.
- This leaves the question, what alternative ways are there for volunteers to gain access to this support system without approximating to the dominant political persuasions?

4.6 Taking action: working with the *secretário do bairro*

Based on the willingness of the SDB to work with the *activistas*, the church-based *activista* group decided to move to a second action phase. In this phase, the *activistas* carried out participatory community research utilising the SAR mapping analysis (as outlined in the Methodology section). This peer research aimed to gain a better understanding of the main problems in the neighbourhood, prioritise the main emergent problems, and develop a practical plan for addressing these problems with the capacity they had as a group. The idea was to take this plan to the SDB and try to get his support, capitalising on the improved relationship between them and the increased access to resource, networks and community working that this could potentially lead to.

On a weekly basis, the *activistas* aimed to conduct one session with different members of the community. The group decided that the aim of the research was to ‘Understand the most pressing problems in the area’. Specific questions they wanted to answer were: How long have you lived in the neighbourhood? How have things changed during this time? What are the main problems in the area? Who responds? Who has the capacity to respond? Who can respond best? Who has the responsibility to respond?

The community stakeholders the group intended to include are shown here alongside the methodological tools they planned to utilise with each stakeholder. The boxes shaded in green indicate that a meeting took place:

General community inquiry	Systemic action exploratory inquiry
Youth groups they work with through the church	Wellbeing maps and discussion
<i>Chefes dos quarteirões</i> (CDQs)	Focused group discussion
OMM – women	(i) Problem thought shower (ii) Cause-and-effect tree
SDB	One-to-one interview
Pupils and teachers from the school.	Cause-and-effect trees
Wider church group	Collaborative meeting

Reflections on working with local governance structures

This action phase offered important insights into the challenges volunteers face when trying to make changes in their communities and how they may be facilitated and supported in this. This will be the focus of this section, rather than the findings from the participatory research undertaken by the *activistas* (which are outlined in the Methodology section).

Conducting the community inquiry and activities with the church youth group and pupils group was unproblematic; the participants were engaged and responsive. Meeting stakeholders with a more direct relationship with the SDB (CDQs and OMM) was more challenging. Initial attempts were made to meet with the first two groups, the CDQs and OMM within the SDB network. When arranging these meetings in person and by telephone the *activista* group noted that “during the phone conversations... SDB distrusted the objectives of our work a little” (Church *activista*). The SDB was in charge of organising all the meetings that the *activistas* wanted to carry out as part of the community research. However, he repeatedly cancelled and shifted meetings or did not attend, and often did not organise any of the meetings that he had stated he would. The *activistas* had to return in person to the SDB office following many failed attempts to meet, to again explain their motives and objectives.

During this meeting the SDB was apologetic about the failed meetings and confirmed the meeting with the CDQs for the coming week. In this SDB meeting, the *activista* had to provide details again of the objectives of the work they wanted to do and why they wanted to meet with the different groups. One *activista* described that following this the “facial expression of SDB showed confidence in the explanation he was given. We are confident that the meeting scheduled for the day... with the heads of the neighbourhood will be held” (Church *activista*).

The SDB again said he would take responsibility for contacting the CDQs to let them know of the meeting. It was set to take place after the wider local structures meeting. The *activistas* were informed that they could arrange the meeting with OMM through the CDQs. The day arrived for the meeting with the CDQs, and the *activistas* were given space after the wider local structures meeting to carry out a set of focused group discussion activities.

During the course of the focus group, it became evident that the CDQ group had not been informed that the meeting would take place, and did not want to attend the meeting. They stated that they thought it very important to have the meeting but that they wanted a separate space to discuss the issues. They did not want to “mix things”, i.e. focus on different topics during one meeting. In addition, it was very late and people wanted to return home. Annoyance within the group could be observed and blame was apportioned to the *activistas*. While some useful data was collected, it was a difficult meeting. The SDB’s failure to inform the group about the meeting could have negatively affected the relationship between the *activistas* and the CDQs.

Upon joint reflection following the meeting, one of the group highlighted that the SDB may not have informed the CDQs of a meeting following the wider local structures meeting, anticipating that the leaders might have been reluctant to attend. The relationship was not felt to be lost, since, as one of the group pointed out, one facilitator “had the capacity to rectify this... and we got the trust of the leaders” (Church *activista*). Furthermore, the meeting made it possible to obtain the contacts of OMM members and a meeting was scheduled and held the following week with this group.

The OMM meeting was successful and the female participants were engaged and responsive. The *activistas* felt that the participants were quite closed and suspicious about talking at first, but after two participants became more vocal, it became easier for others to speak. When reflecting with the *activistas* about the meeting, they said that “this could be because in the ‘party branches’ such as OMM and OJM there are regulations that you are not allowed to share information with just anyone” (Church *activista*).

Conclusion

The action phase showed that the *activistas*’ reflections during the research phase regarding the difficulties of working with the SDB and local governance structures were accurate. Cancelled meetings, disrupted communication and the necessity to justify their actions suggest continued distrust around the objectives of non-party affiliated groups. However, there was also success in gaining access to some of the groups within the local governance network and beginning to gain their trust.

The action phase revealed the complex power dynamics that the volunteers have to engage with and negotiate in order to gain endorsement from local power-holders. In addition, the volunteers are in the difficult position of trying to maintain their neutrality whilst working in highly politicised systems. This may make it more difficult to gain and maintain the trust of those whose power may be dependent on political affiliations, and in situations where local governance structures are politicised.

Implications

- A politicised local governance structure can make informal, non-institutionalised forms of volunteering difficult to carry out. In this context the more formal volunteer situations are trusted and accepted into this system.
- If volunteer resource providers want to try to strengthen this type of informal volunteer activity it might be necessary to gain the permission of local power-holders to carry out activities. However, the provision of resources may also enable a reliance on local governance structures to be sidestepped.
- Informal community volunteer groups may need to spend an extended period of time trying to build the relationship with the local power-holders to prove the apolitical nature of their activities. The time frame should be considered when planning volunteer activities or programmes.

5. Reflections on process

Capturing peer research learning: In order to capture the learning and reflections produced by the peer research *activistas* it was necessary to develop a mechanism to facilitate this. The method used was an Accomplishment Report. This is a record of activities taken during the action phase of the inquiry that enables participants to reflect on achievements made before, during and after the action phase. The approach was based on an approach used in the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* inquiry (Annex 2). It was found to be a good means of cross-fertilising the approaches across the *Valuing Volunteering* country inquiries, but for future practice it would be useful to have a template for capturing learning as part of the SAR process due to the propensity of this approach to utilise the peer research approach. It is something that should be more inherently built into SAR methodological training for researchers.

Engagement and incentives: The current volunteer group were the most enthusiastic and long-term group engaged in the *Valuing Volunteering* research, yet there was still a natural decrease in interest and participation towards the end. The subsidy, training and opportunities to participate in collaborative workshops all contributed to incentivise the volunteers. However, for long-term SAR processes it would be advisable to undertake some careful planning regarding this facet, specifically strategies for maintaining the enthusiasm and interest of the participants for a two-year period and the funding implications of this.

Language: It is very important to highlight here that the initial stage of the inquiry process was extremely difficult due to language issues. The ability to have any communication at all was questionable, and reliance on Google Translate and various friends was necessary. This could greatly affect the quality of the research in the initial stages. At the same time there was restructuring within VSO and delayed clarity around the in-country research budgets so it was unclear if a budget existed or how it might contribute to translation costs. It would be strongly advised, so as to maintain the quality of research, to have a clear, sufficient and stipulated budget allocation from the beginning of the research period or to use a researcher who can speak the national language proficiently.

Further, given that SAR is heavily reliant on personal communication skills and often informal discussions in an organic process, lack of language ability almost completely negates this in the initial exploratory stages. This made it extremely difficult to independently seek volunteer sources outside those recommendations from the VSO programme staff at the initial stages. This could have biased the research and is something that needs very careful consideration. That being said, further into the researcher placement this no longer presented an issue, as budget, translation and personal language capabilities became clearer.

6. Conclusions

In the community involved in this inquiry, people face many poverty-related challenges. One of the most prominent such challenges, which emerged frequently in the inquiry, is that of sexual behaviour, health issues and issues related to these, and is the area that the community church *activistas* have chosen to address. While it is hard to measure sexual behaviour change, there is evidence that the people supported and reached by the *activista* activities do feel the effects and make changes based on this support.

Predominantly the community church *activistas* are working through information sharing and sensitisation at the community level, as well as using role modelling and joint problem solving to address local needs. A lack of impact evaluation mechanisms means that their efforts are not fully captured and there are limited opportunities to understand how, and indeed whether, their approach leads to sustainable behaviour change. *Activistas* need to begin to think of ways that they can capture impact and learning in order to prove their credibility to local institutions and individuals associated with local governance structures, and to gain the confidence of the community.

Communication barriers were perceived by volunteers to be one of the biggest issues that impinged on the church *activistas*' ability to address community health needs. While the *activistas* do utilise a variety of methods to convey information and messages, the barriers of language, literacy and poor community perceptions of volunteers proved a blockage to their functionality and impacted on their ability to make change. Because non-Portuguese speakers are often those who are living in the poorest conditions with least access to education, employment, training and mainstream information sources (i.e. information in Portuguese medium), the volunteers may be limited in reaching these groups if the methods of sensitisation and information sharing are not sensitive to the traditional language landscape of the community.

Helping and permission-seeking relationships are prevalent in this community context in response to meeting health needs. The SDB is a key figure for facilitating volunteering in this local context. Volunteers attached to more formal government-recognised institutions such as the school and hospital have a formal relationship with the SDB which appears to help their functionality in the community. This is also reflected in the fact that the wider community are more aware of the *activistas* and volunteers attached to these establishments than those volunteers occupying more informal spaces, outside the government structures of service delivery. The community church *activistas* have a challenging relationship with the SDB. Although the church itself is trusted by this figure, there is an informal relationship between church and SDB, and this trust does not filter down to the church-based *activistas*. *Activistas* felt that a trusting relationship with the SDB was related to his perceptions of *activistas*' and volunteers' motives.

This inquiry revealed the importance of gaining the support of local governance structures in order for the community church *activistas* to have space to function in the community. Relationships of trust and links to formal institutions and local governance structures all impact on the volunteers' ability to address poverty-related issues in their communities. The relationships with local power-holders need to be reflected on, as they were during the SAR process, to enable volunteers to understand the power dynamics within the volunteer system, how they are affected by them and how they may begin to negotiate these.

Political affiliations and perceived political motivations influence the level of trust that the SDB offers volunteers. If they are trusted not to oppose ruling party politics, support is more likely to be forthcoming and volunteer activities facilitated. Volunteer support, and therefore the impact the volunteer group can have on community health issues, may be heavily dependent on demonstrating political affiliation or proving motives that are non-challenging to the prevailing political ideology. Trust, and the influence of politics on whether this is extended to volunteer groups, may greatly affect the ability of community church *activistas* to gain support to implement their local-level theory of change.

In sum, in order for volunteers to undertake activities that attempt to address health-related issues in the community, closer, more trusting relationships with the SDB may be required. This in turn may require volunteers to avoid engaging in activities that may be perceived as challenging the status quo. The action phase of the SAR process highlighted the dilemmas facing volunteers as they try to negotiate highly politicised contexts. Building relationships that lead to greater access to resources, and greater credibility, also has the potential to compromise the autonomy and neutrality of informal community volunteers, which may then affect community perceptions of them more widely. The SAR approach, which facilitated processes of ongoing reflection and learning, was useful in enabling the volunteers to recognise and negotiate the power dynamics embedded in the system. It allowed them to understand the contradictions that can result from taking action, the non-linearity of change processes, and to reflect and make joint decisions about how they would respond.

7. Implications for VSO's theory of change

“Active citizenship is strengthened by supporting individuals and groups to engage and collaborate more in the life of their community, through volunteering and occupying both formal and informal spaces for citizen engagement. These include community health volunteering initiatives...”

“Our primary focus is the promotion of community level volunteering which leads to active citizenship, working with local organisations to support people within communities to act individually and collectively to shape their own development. We achieve this through volunteer placements to support the development of community volunteering programmes, direct training and support to community volunteers, and capacity building support for organisations supporting community volunteering”.

“working with existing structures”

VSO International, 2014

Regarding the first segment of the theory of change, when we consider the current volunteer context as one that occupies an informal space that may have some benefits with regard to autonomy around decision-making and permission seeking, logically one would presume this might lead to more active citizenship and power for the volunteers to shape their own development. Further that this group are very strongly planted in the community also makes this example one which could be reflective of the sorts of community volunteering situation that VSO would like to support in the process of development changes.

The potential for change through such volunteer groups is therefore large, yet the barriers begin to show when consideration is taken of the dynamics that these types of volunteer groups encounter when trying to work within the existing local structures. Given that VSO state that one of our ways of trying to elicit and support change is through ‘working with existing structures’, this case study demonstrates that at the community level working with key members of the local governance structures, while essential, can also have a negative side. Primarily this might affect active citizenship when building trusting relationships within these structures might mean reduction in the autonomy and power of these informal types of community volunteer. Working within the local structures does bring access to community networks and potential resources which would facilitate the volunteer activity but at the same time can be negatively perceived by the community due to perceptions of the political affiliation of the community volunteer. Therefore volunteer development organisations and local community volunteers might do well to weigh up the positive and negative impacts that functioning within or closer to these structures might have on the changes they can make to address community problems.

Support for this type of less formalised, ‘outsider’ volunteers at the community level may be of great value for achieving changes. Volunteer development organisation support to such groups may have the benefit of sidestepping some of the power and politics dynamics that might be attached to those more formalised types of volunteering which are strongly linked to such local governance structures and in this way strengthen the capacity of more informal volunteer groups to autonomously decide their own focal areas of work. This may have the effect of increasing the individual volunteer group power to address community needs.

As VSO want to engage with informal community volunteers who are addressing community health needs as is stated in the first extract from the *Global Theory of Change* (VSO International, 2014), they may also want to begin to better acknowledge and support responses to the language barriers that impact on this method of information sharing and sensitisation. As some of the poorest people are those who do not speak Portuguese, and access to information is a great problem in Mozambique in general, as instanced in the introductory section, if there are to be felt impacts of volunteering at the community level then language sensitivity must be central. This may involve programming that is sensitive to the cultural language context and development of materials that are in different traditional languages.

If volunteer placements to support such community volunteering were to be considered by VSO in the future, while international volunteers such as those sent by VSO were not focal to this case study, there is still an implication for volunteers who might be sharing skills with community volunteer groups such as the one in this case study. More emphasis and training of the international volunteer to navigate and support these language barriers would go a long way to facilitating these community volunteers to have impacts in their community.

One of the most important things to consider with this type of community volunteering is how to demonstrate its impact as highlighted above. If VSO is considering working with this type of community volunteer, some support and development of systems of impact measurement would be essential to proving that the theory of change has had an impact at the community level and would strengthen the capacity and credibility of the community volunteer group itself. This is one of the issues that the volunteers stated they themselves recognise as an area they would like to strengthen. This has the wider implication that VSO should think carefully about what impacts it would like to see through support given to informal community health volunteer groups such as the one in this case study. They should collaboratively, with those community volunteers, perhaps jointly, analyse how such volunteer groups currently measure their impacts and how they might be supported to measure them better where necessary.

8. Key recommendations

- The subsidies, training and type of role associated with the *activista* term may create competition within the volunteer 'ecosystem', with individuals eager to access the benefits and opportunities that being an *activista* potentially leads to.
- If the differences between volunteers and *activistas* are not recognised formally by the volunteer sector then the potential hierarchy between the two may go unnoticed and any competition that this brings could potentially go unaddressed.
- Sensitisation and information sharing are important, but the impact of this method on community issues is difficult to gauge.
- Volunteer and *activista* groups focusing on sensitisation and access to information around health issues should develop systems to measure the impacts they are having and the sustainability of these interventions.
- If volunteer resource providers plan to capacity-build with this type of volunteer, it would be advisable to design these impact measures collaboratively with volunteers.
- In contexts where literacy rates are low, and there are issues around multiple languages and access to information, the information-sharing, community-level sensitisation role that volunteers undertake may be very important, yet difficult due to the very problems it is trying to address. Language issues and low literacy rates should be carefully considered at the design stage.
- Combinations of different communications methods that do not purely rely on language or literacy abilities are crucial in this context for information sharing to be an effective method for creating health changes in the community.
- Community volunteering in this context may be highly dependent on the relationship that the volunteers and their sending organisation have with the SDB.
- As relationships which facilitate volunteering appear to be based on trust, perceived motives and formalisation through permission seeking and information sharing with local power-holders, volunteer organisations or groups must begin to consider such local-level power dynamics when introducing volunteering programmes or activities.
- Politics may be decreasing the ability of volunteering to reach its full change potential in this community context.
- Supporting informal community volunteers to navigate the local-level relationships and power dynamics necessary for volunteering to take place could be considered by volunteer development organisations.
- Volunteer resource providers need to take account of local politics when designing or supporting community volunteer contexts such as this.
- There may be positive and negative impacts of building relationships with the local power-holders in this context and these should be considered prior to volunteering activities.
- It might be necessary to try to be clear from the start of the relationship-building process that the volunteer activities proposed are politically neutral.
- It might be detrimental to the volunteer group to begin to build this relationship if they are approximating to a system that they do not agree with.
- This leaves the question, what alternative ways are there for volunteers to gain access to this support system without approximating to the dominant political persuasions?
- A politicised local governance structure can make informal, non-institutionalised forms of volunteering difficult to carry out. In this context the more formal volunteer situations are trusted and accepted into this system.
- If volunteer resource providers want to try to strengthen this type of informal volunteer activity, while it might be necessary to gain the permission of local power-holders to carry out activities, resources may also enable a reliance on local governance structures to be sidestepped.
- Informal community volunteer groups may need to spend an extended period of time trying to build the relationship with the local power-holder in attempting to prove the apolitical nature of their activities. The time frame should be considered when planning volunteer activities or programmes.
- Methods of working collaboratively with local-level power-holders whilst maintaining decision-making power and autonomy as volunteers would be useful to develop. Volunteer groups or volunteer development agencies might begin to consider the parameters of this balance between power-holder support and reduced levels of autonomy or decision-making power when engaging in the community.

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Annex 2. Capturing the Learning from the Peer Research Process

ACCOMPLISHMENT REPORT GRUPO ANGLICANOS AEROPORTO A VALUING VOLUNTEERING ACTION PHASE

Rationale; This is a record of the activities taken during the action phase of *valuing volunteering* in aeroporto bairro of Maputo in 2013. As a group of peer researcher and *activistas* the aim of the action phase is to try to strengthen the links and relationship that we as Grupo Anglicanos have with members of the local structures. The process of deciding the action area has been one emerging after 1 year of joint work.

It is hoped we will learn how to work in a more collaborative way with the local structures and will be able to see the impacts our work has before and after their 'acceptance' and documentation of the process of change will help us to understand this better.

Date	Activities

Outcomes and Learning

Valuing Volunteering was a two year (2012 – 2014) global action research project, conducted by VSO and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to understand how, where and when volunteering affects poverty and contributes to sustainable development. This case study is part of a series of inquiries conducted in the Philippines, Kenya, Mozambique and Nepal which explore the role of volunteering across different development contexts and systems. Using Participatory Systemic Action Research it asks local partners, communities and volunteers to reflect on how and where volunteering can contribute to positive, sustainable change.

For more information about the global *Valuing Volunteering* study please contact: enquiry@vso.org.uk

Alexandrea Picken is an experienced international development researcher with 7 years experience in research and evaluation with a focus on marginalised groups. Alongside an MSc in Social Development Practice, she has solid experience in learning, reflection and documenting practices and is experienced in utilising this to inform policy, programmatic and organisational aims. Alexandria has designed and managed research and evaluation projects in the UK and internationally mostly in Africa; Tanzania, Malawi, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa and most recently, lead researcher and project manager in Mozambique for the *Valuing Volunteering* action-research project. Alexandria has a particular interest in and experience of the application of participatory and qualitative research techniques. Alexandria is currently working as a research and evaluation officer for the Scottish Executive Agency; Education Scotland whilst also doing freelance development consultancy for an international consultancy research network.



VSO Mozambique

Caixa Postal 902
Maputo
Mozambique

+258 21302594/311572

VSO International

www.vsointernational.org

Institute of Development Studies

www.ids.ac.uk

ISBN 978-1-903697-94-8



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