

VALUING VOLUNTEERING - THE PHILIPPINES

NATIONAL REPORT

Reporting on two years of systemic action research to understand how, when and why volunteering contributes to poverty alleviation

2014



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Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| ACES | Alicia Central Elementary School |
| CLCD | Centre for Citizenship, Leadership and Democracy |
| ICS | International Citizen Service |
| IDS | Institute of Development Studies |
| IEC | Information, Education and Communication |
| INGO | International non-governmental organisation |
| INSA | Institutional Network for Social Action |
| ISTR | International Society for Third-Sector Research |
| LAV | Love Affair with Volunteering |
| LGU | Local Government Unit |
| M&E | Measurement and evaluation |
| MPA | Marine Protected Area |
| NCEAV | National Conference on the Engagement of Academe in Volunteering |
| NCPAG | National College for Public Administration and Governance |
| NCV | National Coalition on Volunteerism |
| NGO | Non-governmental organisation |
| PNVSCA | Philippines National Volunteer Sector Coordination Agency |
| TMO | Tubbataha Management Office |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |
| UP | University of the Philippines |
| WWF | World Wildlife Fund for Nature |

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1. Executive Summary

In recent years, global and national initiatives have begun to integrate the idea that volunteerism creates tangible change for communities in poverty into development policy and discourse. For a society with socially embedded values of *bayanihan* (embodying mutual assistance and self-help in times of need and togetherness in a common effort) and *pakikipagkapwa* (self in relation to others), the introduction of legal frameworks, policies and initiatives to endorse volunteerism as a strategy for development has been relatively easy. Yet, despite this progress, limited research has made it challenging for the volunteer-involving sector, and associated government actors like the Philippines National Volunteer Sector Coordination Agency (PNVSCA), to make a compelling case that can elevate the role of volunteers and active citizens as key actors shaping social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines is part of the global *Valuing Volunteering* research and learning project supported by VSO and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to understand and enhance volunteering for development. The fieldwork for the research is being conducted in five countries: Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal and the Philippines. This report summarises two years of inquiry work with communities, volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations across Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao to answer our central research question: ‘How, when and why does volunteering affect poverty?’

Between May 2012 and May 2014, the research has explored volunteering in the context of natural resource management and higher education using a methodology called systemic action research. This approach embeds multi-stakeholder inquiry in an analysis of the wider systems and the nature of the relationships within those systems. By working with communities, volunteers, local partners, and volunteer-involving organisations we set out to understand the contexts, dynamics and experiences of volunteering. The empirically generated data of our locally grounded, community-level inquiries were supported by research into the way impact is framed in current volunteering programming. These ‘theories of change’ provided us with a set of expectations and assumptions which we also used to make sense of findings and their implications.

This national report summarises our insights about the qualities of volunteering as a change tool, lessons from the way volunteers work and clarity about how to mobilise and deploy volunteering for development. It documents the findings of four illustrative case studies, which are each supported by more detailed reports.

We found that supporting change to happen in complex poverty environments is a slow process. Volunteers lend much-needed energy to development journeys. Through fostering relationships built on solidarity, shared experiences and a motivation to work for the common good, volunteers can become important allies of people living in poverty. If fully maximised, the links volunteering creates between marginalised communities and socially respected institutions (e.g. universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs)) can legitimise marginalised concerns and improve support for pro-poor development. This role is particularly important in communities that have been negatively affected by national development efforts and who lack the knowledge, self-belief or practice to approach government departments and other powerful decision-makers on their own.

Volunteer programme designs that create an enabling environment for relationships to take centre stage maximise people’s inherent motivation to connect to those around them, which helps make change happen. For example, the way volunteers embedded in communities naturally foster connections in formal and informal settings can increase the spread of ideas and behaviours, increase the number of local actors who get involved, and shift social norms and local expectations about how to go about development (e.g. by making it more inclusive or participatory). Where volunteers make use of their social actions and interactions to create opportunities for people living in poverty to practise at making change happen they lay the foundational capacities for local actors to become active rather than passive in their community’s development.

While efforts on the part of volunteers to strengthen social mobilisation for change are an important piece of the puzzle, they are not always sufficient to singularly respond to the scale of the development challenges facing some communities in the Philippines. The complexities of change often defy the logical assumptions articulated in our theories of change about how volunteering can help to make a difference. This is particularly the case when the institutional processes of development organisations and government agencies lack the flexibility and capacity to respond to citizen-led efforts to tackle poverty enabled by volunteers while in placement. For example, it happens when volunteering programmes neglect, rather than nurture, the local actors who get inspired and who frequently determine the sustainability of ideas and activities. And it happens when the contribution of people living in poverty is not adequately compensated or made possible by available project or programme budgets.

To match human resources to complex change environments takes practice. Every new situation (e.g. renewed cycles of volunteers, unexpected events like natural disasters or changes in local leadership) creates a different set of demands on support staff, volunteers, local partners and community members. The cycles of learning and action used in this research indicate how it is helpful to view the practice of volunteering for development as an ongoing process of reflection and experimentation where all the stakeholders in the change effort are recognised and encouraged to learn from one another. This approach to volunteering challenges perceptions of “volunteering as charity” and is much more in line with traditional values of mutuality and reciprocity which characterise pre-colonial expressions of citizenship. In these models, community development is a social activity composed of a network of interlinked actors, all with a valued and recognised role to play.

Key implications

The four case studies making up the body of this report offer empirically based evidence about how volunteering affects poverty within specific contexts. Overarching implications from these case studies and the wider *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* research are summarised here. They offer insights into when volunteering works best, how we should think about volunteering for development, and what needs to be done to enhance its contribution.

When volunteering works best

From mobilising to moving with purpose

In a cultural context which celebrates the spirit of volunteerism, the Philippines is in a strong position to mobilise its citizens in the fight against poverty and inequality. At the same time, attention is needed to steward the quality and direction of volunteer efforts. One-time efforts or activity that never gets to the root causes of poverty are not effective from a development perspective. Volunteering programmes need to consider the conditions and complementary interventions that have to be in place to enable volunteers to attain the best, pro-poor outcomes before deployment. Volunteers of all kinds (e.g. local, national, international) need to be supported to develop an emotional and intellectual connection between their actions and the change they bring about in the wider world. This helps people to learn and enhance their capacities as active citizens. It makes volunteerism more purposeful.

Volunteering as a team effort

We discovered the benefit of having multidisciplinary teams to tackle complex problems. Change efforts rely on people with a range of different specialist technical knowledge, people who hold specialist local knowledge, life experience and particular perspectives (e.g. gender), and facilitators who can sustain momentum and learning. Volunteers rarely do effective work on their own. This reality sits at odds with volunteer support systems that are typically designed around individual placements and disconnected job descriptions. Recruitment processes need to elevate the importance of relational skills in volunteer selection. Volunteers of all kinds (e.g. local, national, international) need to be equipped with the tools to understand how to optimise social networks for change. Individual volunteers are best supported by systems that enable communication and coordination between actors working in the same geographical area or on similar issues. Support systems also need to provide viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate in change efforts. This may mean project money for social activities to nurture unity and a sense of common purpose, as well as accompanying volunteer stipends to enable local actors to join the change effort. This is not only about exercising a duty of care to those who have least, but about proactively nurturing local capacities for stewarding social and environmental change.

New ways of thinking about volunteering

Positioning volunteerism as a people's agenda

National development efforts often negatively affect marginalised and excluded groups, particularly when they increase instability of land tenure and access for these groups. Temporary quick fixes offered by the volunteer sector (e.g. feeding programmes, gift-giving, one-off trainings) do not address the drivers of social injustice and poverty. And a 'do no harm' approach is blind to the realities of volunteering, which often distributes risks and benefits unevenly among stakeholders (e.g. volunteers in structured programmes vs local volunteers who join the change effort). The volunteering sector needs to think about the relationship it fosters with government to advance pro-poor development. Making more use of the sector's 'symbolic capital' to legitimise and elevate the concerns of the most marginalised in national debates is likely to help, as well as influencing government institutions so they are better able to respond to citizen-led efforts to tackle poverty. The sector needs to do more to support people in poverty to make sense of volunteering as a resource they can utilise and influence for their own development.

Seeing volunteerism as an opportunity to strengthen governance

Through the work of volunteers, we learned how volunteering programmes can support social mobilisation on the part of communities. But we also learned how these efforts can be undermined by political and organisational systems of governance which lack the capacity to respond to citizen-led initiatives. These systems confine people living in poverty to the role of beneficiary and do not provide meaningful routes for them to participate and advocate for their priorities. The way volunteer-involving organisations – and volunteers themselves – engage with local partners and decision-makers is an opportunity to model ways of working that espouse different standards of democratic governance and participation. For example, platforms for youth volunteering can change perceptions among local leaders about the contribution young people can make to development objectives, making the change process more inclusive over time.

Local government and decision-making bodies in particular need support to understand the difference active citizens can make to their change programmes so they are seen as more than 'warm bodies' to help with top-down programme implementation. Volunteer-involving organisations need to think about designing a practical tool to analyse governance practice (and not just policy) before making decisions about partners to work with. This will help them identify collaborators who are working to a pro-poor agenda. Volunteer programmes need to incorporate consideration of the support volunteers require when operating in highly political terrains for the benefit of excluded and marginalised communities. In hierarchical social contexts volunteers need to recognise that laying the foundations for collaborative working often means developing individual capacities in combination with collective capacities so successes are not one-person achievements but shared endeavours. The proactive use of participatory development principles and action research approaches applied in this research can help create the space to hear from and encourage local actors whose contribution is usually closed off by power dynamics.

New ways of doing volunteering

Stay and deliver when problems persist

Examination of volunteers' pathways round life tells us that volunteerism will always come in many forms, from short-term engagements to long-term commitments. Each has its place in instigating and encouraging change, but change in highly complex poverty contexts is a slow process. We learned that long-term relationships are not always indicators of dependency, especially when partnerships are used to foster important capacities within marginalised and excluded communities to advocate for their own development. These relationships can either be forged by volunteers or the programmes that manage the movement of volunteers in and out of projects. As a resource for development, volunteering needs to find more consistent and coherent ways of sharing in the risks of experimentation, recognising that people living in poverty can least afford to invest their time in volunteer projects which are aiming at (but cannot guarantee) tangible improvements.

Advance volunteer programme design

We learned how volunteers can encourage collaborative working and infuse development processes with much-needed energy. Volunteers often work through relationship building, making them very well suited to working 'deep' rather than 'wide' with communities. The 'added value' of trusting and consistent relationships in change processes could be better articulated to funders. More could also be done to integrate volunteering placements into existing development programmes (e.g. led by government, NGOs or private partners) rather than their operating as stand-alone ventures. Lastly, more research should be undertaken to understand the unintended impacts of volunteer programme design on communities living in poverty. Linking community insights into strategic discussions about the institutional processes in place to organise funding, recruitment and management of volunteers will help identify constraints and opportunities to improve volunteering as a tool for development that is responsive to the pressing needs of communities.

New approaches to monitoring impact

Typically measurement and evaluation (M&E) work is undertaken to justify and report volunteering impact against programme goals – or it is not done at all. It is a missed opportunity when volunteering programmes do not capture the richness of change using locally grounded assessments at the community level about what is working and why. We learned how all volunteers and active citizens are a variable in the change process. They are not a constant or uniform resource. Rather they simultaneously affect, and are affected by, the situation around them. The research shows the importance of re-evaluating the purpose, focus and role of volunteers at regular intervals and from multiple stakeholders' perspectives. Participatory approaches that support communities and volunteers to think systemically and act experimentally inject adaptability into volunteering initiatives, which helps everyone involved to respond to new insights and changing realities. This approach does not have to be arduous or accompanied by formal reporting. Spaces for reflection and conversation can be informal, enjoyable, thought-provoking and empowering, especially when effort is taken to provide feedback and link insights from one stakeholder group to another. This ongoing learning process can build capacities within communities, volunteers, volunteer support staff and partners about how to use volunteering for positive change. We documented the specific techniques we used in the accompanying case study reports.

2. Introduction

The year 2010 saw a 7.3% rise in GDP accompanied by a rise in levels of poverty (UNDP, 2012a). For the Philippines, as with much of the Asia-Pacific region, rapid economic growth means less foreign aid plus all the socio-economic costs to governments of widening inequalities. Development in the Philippines is difficult to disentangle from the impact of natural disasters and shifting climatic conditions. Comprising over 7,000 islands situated on the Pacific ‘Ring of Fire’ and in the Pacific typhoon belt, in the last two decades the country has experienced 270 natural disasters, more than any other country in the world (UNDP, 2012a). These disasters, exacerbated by climate change effects, are considered in part to explain the slow progress made towards Millennium Development Goals, including on poverty and the environment (UNDP, 2012b).

“I understand volunteering is good for the volunteer. But why does the world need volunteers?”

Young person, Libon, Legazpi

One mechanism increasingly recognised as a means to enhance government-led efforts in national development is volunteering (Congress of the Philippines, 2007). In 2013, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) published a Memorandum Circular (No. 2013-27) on the establishment of Volunteer and Citizenship Desks at the local government level in an effort to intensify citizen participation in local governance (DILG, 2013). In a society with socially embedded values of *bayanihan* (embodying mutual assistance and self-help in times of need and togetherness in a common effort) and *pakikipagkapwa* (self in relation to others), volunteering is recognised simultaneously as a Filipino tradition and a Western concept (Aguiling-Dalisay et al, 2004). Its values are present in multiple languages and ethnic groups (Cariño, 2002). These pre-colonial expressions of citizenship still influence Filipino identity today, continuing to form the basis of many informal social actions and interactions that take place within communities (e.g. house-building) and between communities (e.g. in disaster response).

Today, traditional patterns of sharing among equals coexist with more Christian notions of charity, where people give their time, talent and treasure to those who are less fortunate, out of a sense of religious duty or social responsibility (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nElo-qsJOMI>). This perception of ‘volunteering as charity’ remains distinct from a third, perhaps more recent, conceptualisation, underpinned by notions of solidarity and/or a return to the idea that traditional values of mutuality and reciprocity need to be integrated into models of volunteerism, so that resources are pooled and successes are shared (Garcia, 2013).

Are all these varied expressions of care towards others an important input into the country’s development? As one keynote speaker at the 2013 Philippines Volunteering Expo (<http://www.vsobahaginan.org/volunteeringexpo>) suggested, if GDP encompassed a wider definition of economic wealth to include time as well as money it is unlikely the Philippines would be regarded as a ‘developing nation’. It may be considered an unequal country, but not a poor one. That said, assessing the contribution of all this time, energy and experience to national and local development remains a challenge. Limited research has made it challenging for the volunteer-involving sector – and associated government actors like the PNVSCA – to make a compelling case that can elevate the role of volunteers and active citizens as key actors alongside government and private enterprise shaping social, environmental and economic outcomes.

Measurement of Filipino wellbeing found non-material dimensions of spirituality, family relationships and the desire to do good to others to be at the core of people’s sense of wellbeing (Asis and Luna, 2000). However, the relatively low importance given to community participation and social relationships beyond the immediate family was raised as a particular concern for development workers and community organisers. While the authors suggest that volunteer efforts could be more effectively harnessed, they stress the importance of increasing a “collective identity” rather than individual achievement, warning that “the expectations riding on people empowerment programs may require a lot more ground work” (Asis and Luna, 2000: 68–9). Subsequent research into the psychology of volunteering called for a “systemic research inquiry into the inter-relationship among volunteers, volunteer organization managers, community/individual volunteer partners and donors”, emphasising the need to better understand the “synergetic action among these partners and the environmental impact of volunteering” (Aguiling-Dalisay et al, 2004: 188).

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has focused two years of research on understanding the worth of volunteering from a social change perspective. Its inquiries have been situated at the interface of volunteering and poverty alleviation work, exploring what the findings mean for how volunteering for development is currently organised in the Philippines and offering new insights into ways of ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ volunteering in the future. This remit has opened up many avenues of research interest, taking us to many different communities across Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. Contributing to the central *Valuing Volunteering* research question, ‘How, when and why does volunteering affect poverty?’, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* found itself particularly interested in answering some of the following questions:

- What’s the difference between mobilising and mobilising with purpose?
- What are the capacities within poor communities to realise the value of volunteer activity?
- How are accountability and responsibility for volunteering impacts (positive and negative) shared?
- What should the volunteering sector’s relationship with government look like?
- How can volunteer activity carried out in the spirit of bayanihan (e.g. short-term, responsive, needs-based) become a platform for nurturing an engaged citizenry for longer-term, sustainable development?

We have explored volunteering in the context of natural resource management and higher education (with a focus on youth and active citizenship).

Natural resource management

In a biomass-based economy like the Philippines, the wellbeing of its citizens – and especially the poorest – is dependent on the services provided by natural ecosystems as the basis for economic activity, livelihoods and meeting subsistence needs through agriculture, forestry and fishing.

The Philippines scores poorly on assessments of ecosystem health (Prescott-Allen, 2001; Lasco and Espaldon, 2005), and concerns continue around rates of degradation, particularly where this increases the vulnerability of communities and threatens future socio-economic benefits (Conservation International – Philippines, 2007). Recent national policy emphasis (National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan, 2011) on prevention and mitigation has made visible, at least in words, the potential for linking climate change adaptation efforts with sustainable living (e.g. waste management, ecosystem protection, alternative livelihood options).

National interest in the role that volunteerism can play at the intersection between environment, poverty and vulnerability was affirmed by a 2013 survey carried out by the Local Government Academy and the DILG, which found demand for volunteers by service area, among local government units, clustering around disaster preparedness and agricultural development (DILG, 2013).

We carried out inquiry work with Tubbataha Management Office (TMO), a government office looking after the protection of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park in Palawan. We examined the use of environmental science graduate volunteers in environmental education work with communities, informing organisational learning about the future direction of their Information, Education and Communication (IEC) programme. We carried out action research with the community of Mangingisda in Puerto Princesa to understand how to make effective use of volunteerism in highly complex poverty contexts. In Bohol, we carried out a long inquiry process with Carood Watershed Model Forest Management Council and VSO Bahaginan to understand how a whole ecosystem of volunteers interacts with people in poverty, local decision-making structures and volunteer management protocols to support protection of natural resources for local development.

Higher education – youth and active citizenship

Since the very first days of *Valuing Volunteering's* work in the Philippines, the academe has repeatedly been mentioned as a key institutional support for volunteerism and active citizenship in the country. Within government, volunteering is recognised as one of the activities by which higher education institutions contribute to the attainment of societal values and national development. As such, Philippine universities are expected to perform three functions: instruction, research and extension. While the latter receives the least funding out of the three, many universities – public and private – have distinct volunteer programmes.

The National Conference on the Engagement of the Academe in Volunteering (NCEAV) in December 2012 was the first time that academic institutions, civil society organisations and government agencies from the three main island groups – Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao – came together to discuss their work and look to the future as a collective. The resulting manifesto and conference proceedings called for further research to understand how volunteering extends beyond personal impacts to societal ones, highlighting the importance of including marginalised groups in any research process.

We carried out inquiry work with six volunteering programmes situated in public and private universities all over the Philippines to understand how universities leverage their considerable human resource – students, alumni and faculty staff – to influence the trajectory of change and development for people living in poverty. It was also an opportunity to work with in-country volunteering organisations and educational institutions to integrate participatory and systemic approaches into analyses about how volunteering affects poverty.

Theories of change

There are many ways a question about how, when and why volunteering affects poverty could be approached. One would be for researchers to develop a theoretical framework and test the extent to which its hypotheses hold true on the ground. A challenge for this approach is the limited nature of evidence about the things that change because of volunteering. There is a lot of data on how volunteering improves the lives of volunteers but very little on how it changes the experiences and circumstances of people who are marginalised, excluded or trapped by poverty.

We thought it would be better to reach our conclusions through a research process that forged its insights from empirically grounded case studies. Rather than focus on measurable outcomes of volunteering, we set out to understand contexts, dynamics and experiences of volunteering which contribute to how change happens. Informing this inquiry work, however, was a concerted effort to capture the way impact is framed in current volunteering programming. These 'theories of change' provided us with a set of expectations and assumptions that we could use to determine which of our insights are most meaningful to a Philippines country context and the volunteering sector more widely.

Together, the case studies highlighted in this report offer insights about the qualities of volunteering as a change tool, lessons from the way volunteers work and clarity about how to mobilise and deploy volunteering for development.

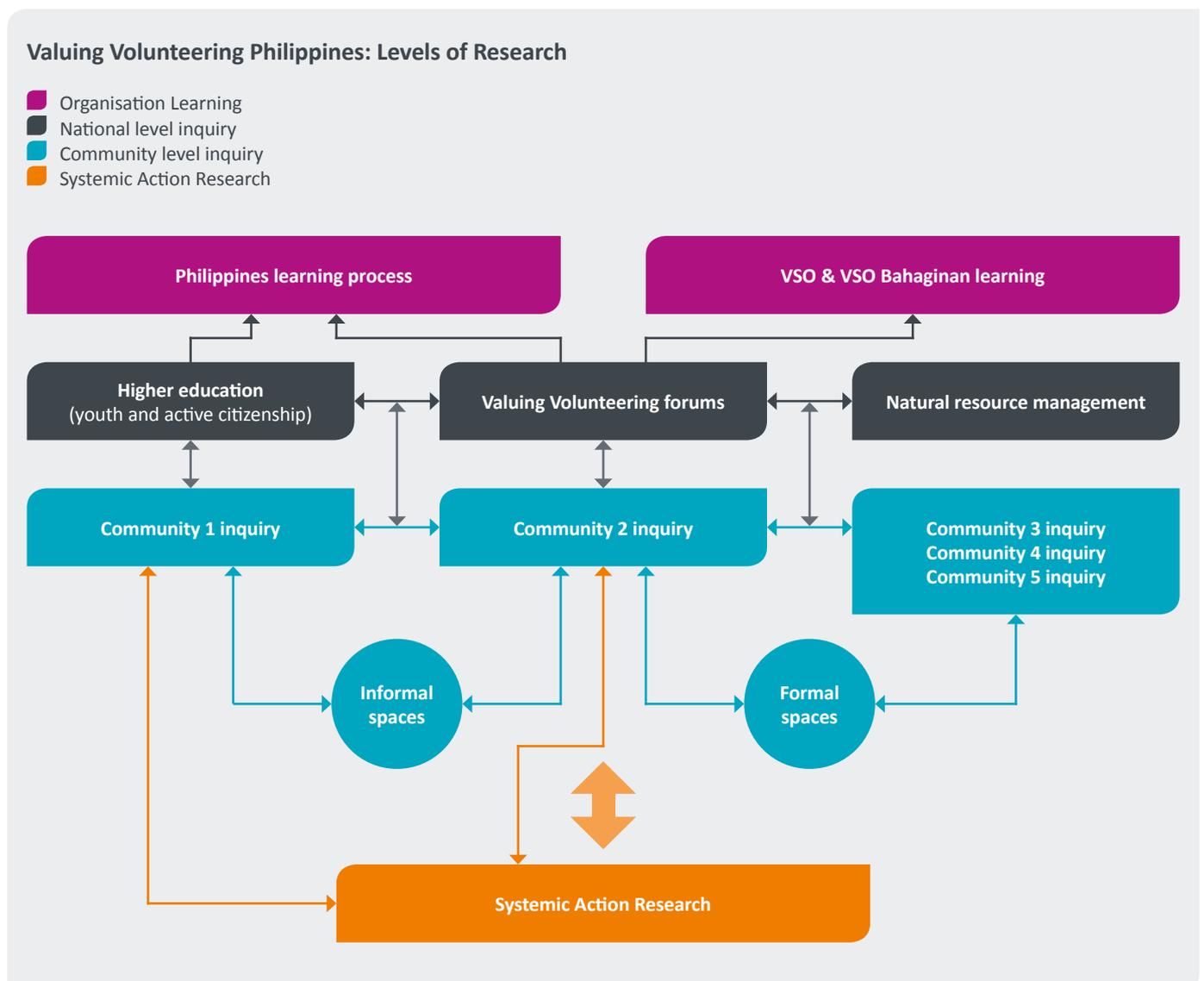
3. Methodology

Valuing Volunteering Philippines is part of a global research and learning project to understand and enhance volunteering for development in five countries: Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nepal and the Philippines.

The project used participatory systemic action research. Systemic action research is a methodology that enables researchers to embed inquiry in an analysis of the wider systems and the nature of the relationships within those systems (e.g. unequal power relations, the local, national or global economic and political environment; the supporting organisation; its volunteers and partner communities) that affect how change happens. It has been used by volunteering organisations such as the British Red Cross (Burns, 2007), and in the field of development including on the Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation Programme in East Africa (Burns, 2012) and on a community radio project for climate change in Ghana (Harvey et al, 2012).

In the context of the Valuing Volunteering project, its multi-stakeholder, multi-sited and multi-level approach integrated different perspectives into a participatory process to look at the whole landscape of poverty issues that affect and are affected by volunteering. Rather than take a static snapshot the aim is to go on a journey, creating practical knowledge as we go at different levels of the system (see Figure 1), which can be used by participants to understand and enhance the impact of volunteering.

Figure 1. Working across different levels of the system in the Philippines



In practice, our investigations took two interlinked forms: participatory systemic inquiry and action research. Our entry point into most inquiries began with participatory systemic inquiries. Lasting from one to three days to over a year, the purpose was to explore the change pathways of different examples of volunteering, set within a specific context. Data collection was interspersed with reflection among relevant stakeholders to make sense of findings and their implications. This collective learning process informed the insights in this report.

In three cases, we used action research, which integrated participatory systemic inquiry with experimental action in continuous cycles of learning whereby observation and reflection informs action, and action informs the next round of reflection (see Figure 2).

We used the planning, action, observation and reflection stages to learn about the impact of our efforts so we could adapt over a second cycle of action–reflection, and so on. Learning through doing enabled us to test assumptions about how volunteering impacts poverty, adding a robustness to our collective analysis. And it embedded the values of participatory development into the research itself, actively involving and learning from citizens and partners in the process.

It was also an intention of *Valuing Volunteering* and in-country research partners to use the project as an opportunity to develop capacity for participatory systemic action research across the volunteering sector, its volunteers, communities and partner organisations. Please see case study reports for detailed documentation on the methods used.

Research in the Philippines took place between May 2012 and May 2014 in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

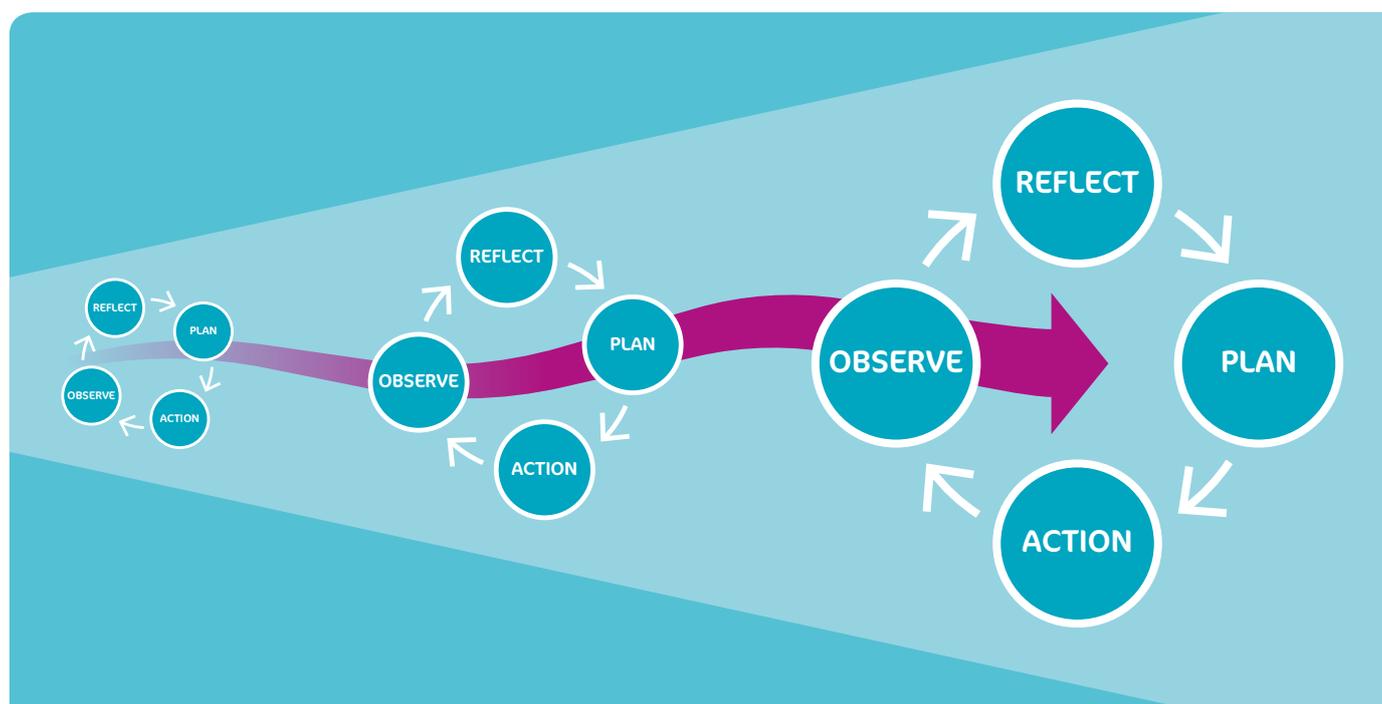
Community inquiries

The purpose of running inquiries at the community level was to situate an examination of volunteering within a specific social, cultural and political context. The aim was to gain a level of detail and nuance to inform a more faithful understanding of how volunteering is experienced, especially by those living in poverty. We worked with:

- a *barangay* in Quezon City, Manila, carrying out *participatory systemic inquiry* across three visits to map and interrogate the difference volunteering had made to residents
- the LGU, colleges, schools and youth volunteers in Libon, Legazpi, carrying out *action research* to establish a youth volunteering programme run by young people and supported by the LGU
- Filipino and British youth volunteers working in Carood Watershed in Bohol, carrying out *participatory systemic inquiry* to map social networks and relational qualities that support change to happen
- a local youth group in Guindulman in Bohol, carrying out *action research* to strengthen capacity to reflect on their relationship to volunteers and decision-makers who can help progress plans to establish a comfort room on the beach for local residents
- Tubbataha Management Office in a year-long, multi-sited *participatory systemic inquiry* in coastal communities of Palawan to understand the contribution of volunteers to environmental education
- a *barangay* in Puerto Princesa, carrying out *action research* by a group of international, national, local and resident volunteers to take action on three fronts: ecological (to protect fish stocks), livelihoods (to provide alternative ways of generating income) and volunteerism (to direct human resources towards the first two)
- six municipalities belonging to Carood Watershed in Bohol, carrying out a year-long *participatory systemic inquiry*, examining how poverty outcomes are affected when volunteering is organised to multiple theories of change and linked to local governance structures
- six private and public universities in a multi-sited *participatory systemic inquiry*, exploring the conditions by which university-led volunteering contributes to poverty alleviation and active citizenship.

The last four inquiries have been written up into detailed case studies, which form the basis of this report.

Figure 2. Continuous, iterative cycles of learning in action research



National inquiries

Valuing Volunteering Philippines joined regular meetings in 2012 with members of the newly established National Coalition on Volunteerism. Over time, the research also began to engage government departments and NGOs working on poverty alleviation and development issues. A national forum in April 2013 brought voluntary organisations together with local and national government to discuss a pro-poor landscape for volunteering. This group of actors came together again for a forum in October 2013 to explore learning from the international *Valuing Volunteering* and apply it to a Filipino context. A forum in May 2014 continued cross-sector engagement, with presentation and discussion of the research findings.

www.lovetovolunteer.ph was designed by a national volunteer to provide a web platform for sharing insights and soliciting public feedback.

International inquiry spaces

Valuing Volunteering Philippines shared insights on an online international platform called Eldis Communities to engage a wider group of stakeholders and professionals in the conversation. This space was useful for debating emerging ideas. You can sign up at community.eldis.org and search for Valuing Volunteering. The project was supported throughout by an external global reference group, which included members of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) and academics from a range of disciplines.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines also participated in an Asia-Pacific meeting hosted by VSO UK on volunteering and active citizenship, as part of an ongoing inquiry exploring the relationship between the two.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines visited the research in Nepal to discuss methodological considerations to ensure parity of approach across countries. The Philippines hosted an international learning visit comprising delegates from VSO UK, Valuing Volunteering Nepal and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). This was an opportunity to strengthen organisational and national learning based on emergent findings.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines participated in two write-shops facilitated by IDS in the UK to shape the conceptual framework, analytical categories and write-up of the wider project findings. Relevant blogs have been shared with the IDS community, engaging action research and participatory research practitioners (<https://www.ids.ac.uk/project/valuing-volunteering>) in discussion about our findings.

4. Case studies

This section summarises the background, approach and learning of four case studies carried out by *Valuing Volunteering Philippines*. Each has a more detailed case study report, which discusses the specific methods, participants and findings in more detail and provides a set of recommendations relevant to the specific institutions and sectors involved. References and links to these reports are provided in the Appendix.

When there are no fish left in the sea. Does environmental awareness translate into positive action?

Reporting on the contribution of volunteering for environmental education in coastal communities of Palawan

The Philippines scores poorly on assessments of ecosystem health, and concerns continue around rates of degradation, particularly where this increases the vulnerability of communities and threatens future socio-economic benefits. One established tool to aid protection of marine ecosystems is Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). The basic idea is to place some restrictions on human activity within some area of ocean in order to protect the natural environment.

Since 2001, TMO has looked after the protection of Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park. Covering 97,030 hectares, the MPA lies at the heart of the Coral Triangle, considered the richest marine site on earth, and a fish bank for the Sulu Sea. In 2009–10, TMO introduced a volunteering programme to carry out environmental education in schools and coastal *barangays* (villages) throughout municipalities in the province of Palawan to increase awareness about Tubbataha and related environmental concerns also affecting local fishing grounds. Its volunteers, usually young people with environmental science degrees, design and deliver IEC sessions with schools and fishermen in coastal *barangays* in Palawan. Working to cover a large geographical area, they go on tour each year to provide these education sessions.

Volunteers are often used as educators in development work to introduce new ideas, knowledge and perspectives to communities. This is frequently the case in environmental sectors, where new knowledge is perceived to be an important precursor to action on environmental issues. In the context of the *Valuing Volunteering* project's central research question, 'How, when and why does volunteering affect poverty?', TMO's work was considered an interesting jumping-off point for exploring the role volunteering can play at the intersection between environment, poverty and sustainable livelihoods. TMO was willing to join *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* on a journey of learning, reflection and action to furnish the wider research process with an examination of volunteering that is situated within a specific social, economic and environmental context.

Rather than explore the unique qualities of volunteers as development workers, this case study set out to understand the use and deployment of volunteer educators in short-term community engagements to raise awareness as a mechanism for alleviating poverty. Our starting questions included:

1. What changes for communities and the environment because of volunteer action on environmental education? What mechanisms and pathways support the changes?
2. Does awareness on environmental issues lead to behaviour change?
3. What can be learned from this study to inform the involvement of volunteers in other environmental and conservation initiatives?

This summary pulls together the learning of four interlinked inquiries in urban and rural coastal communities of Palawan, including Puerto Princesa, Mangingisda, Roxas and Green Island. Undertaking a series of participatory systemic inquiries, each lasting one to four days, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* researchers worked with TMO, volunteer educators, community participants in the environmental education programme and the wider community to learn how change happens from locally grounded insights about what works and what doesn't work in a particular context.

During our inquiries we came across other forms of volunteerism, taking place at the community level. Where possible we included these efforts in our analysis of how, when and why volunteering affects poverty. The direction of this sub-inquiry prompted more detailed action research with the community of Mangingisda to understand in more detail the efficacy and limitations of volunteering as a tool to support people in high-poverty environments in the process of adapting to environmental change (see next case study summary).

The insights informed an interlinked organisational learning process to help TMO evaluate its IEC programme. This began with TMO staff and volunteer sessions to establish an organisational theory of change about how TMO's use of volunteers for environmental education contributes to improvements in natural resource management and associated socio-economic benefits for communities. The research pointed to ways this may be adapted to improve impact in future IEC work.

Findings

Our findings are broadly organised around what changed in the communities following the environmental education, how volunteer educators enabled these changes, and what didn't change and why. Seven key issues capture what we learned:

Volunteer educators provide links to information from outside the community. We found the degradation of natural resources is continuing apace and is observed in communities while the expertise for understanding complex human and ecological dynamics sits within university departments and government offices. Knowledge is not readily available to communities about the links between natural resource decline and food security or livelihoods. Punitive measures set out in legal frameworks can cost poor families and communities when laws (e.g. no-take fishing zones) are breached. To irrigate information into the villages, schools and local leader networks of coastal communities takes people power. TMO and its volunteers play an important role in addressing the inequality of this knowledge gap.

Volunteer educators can improve knowledge and awareness through one-off educational inputs. It is fairly typical that volunteers working on awareness-raising programmes engage with communities for a short period of time to deliver educational sessions. We found evidence that these one-off educational inputs supported people to learn about Tubbataha and wider environmental issues such as climate change. The creative and interactive way that IEC sessions were delivered seemed to help people retain knowledge. TMO's efforts to intentionally recruit young people with environmental backgrounds and tailor its volunteer support were important ingredients explaining how the IEC programme led to improvements in knowledge.

Community and systemic factors affect the accessibility of environmental messages delivered by volunteer educators. We found short-term engagements by volunteer educators are limited in terms of the people environmental messages reach. Accessibility can be improved by aligning schedules of sessions to the rhythms of community life and targeting key local actors (e.g. teachers) who could be instrumental in extending the impact of a single IEC session. The relevance of environmental messages in high-poverty contexts could be improved by volunteer educators who use techniques that help communities connect the dots between personal and ecological concerns. Enabling dialogue should also improve volunteers' understanding of how communities see natural resources and conservation objectives. This will help improve the flexibility of educational materials to respond to changing attitudes and perceptions over time.

Behaviour is resistant to change, even when knowledge is high. A major assumption in the perceived value of deploying volunteers to carry out environmental education is that it changes behaviour in some way. We found some evidence of fishermen avoiding Tubbataha, but fishing behaviour in local fishing grounds has not changed. This is because the drivers of unsustainable behaviour are plentiful and powerful. They are wide-ranging, including:

- ecological
- economic
- lack of alternative livelihoods
- inequalities in the fishing industry
- poor governance and local leadership
- inward migration.

In this context, volunteer action through educational campaigns is not sufficient to dislodge systemic forces to influence a different way of being and doing at the community level. At some point volunteering for environmental and poverty alleviation outcomes needs to directly address changes to behaviour.

Volunteer action by residents is not aligned to drivers of unsustainable behaviour. Volunteer action on the part of residents on environmental issues is happening in the communities we visited. But it does not tackle the root causes of environmental degradation and the associated food and livelihood challenges. This challenged a hidden assumption in our thinking: an expectation that resident volunteering would be closer to local realities, and therefore responsive to community needs. This energy and commitment could be an important resource for making behaviour change possible. But making volunteering more purposeful at the community level may initially require capacity development from external stakeholders (e.g. government offices, NGOs, outside volunteers) to match volunteer action to potential solutions that work for people and the planet. Outside volunteers may provide additional value to local efforts through their links to organisations and networks that extend beyond the existing social capital of the community.

A role for volunteer educators in strengthening local action on environmental issues. A supportive local environment, with active leadership on environmental concerns, was identified as a missing component by many participants in the communities we visited. At the same time, we found pockets of young people, women, and fishermen who shared a passion for the environment and a genuine concern to prevent its demise. We saw an opportunity for volunteer educators to begin to address behaviour change by proactively mobilising local champions through their environmental education engagements. These individuals, groups and networks would be able to sustain local efforts once volunteer educators from outside the community left.

Going from volunteer educator to environmental advocate. As well as providing specific resource inputs to change initiatives, volunteer opportunities can generate resource outputs, particularly when they create or sustain people's interest in working on environmental issues. Investment on the part of TMO to enable a positive volunteer experience pays off when the young people become 'walking promos' and 'future advocates' for marine conservation, extending the social network of the organisation and its cause.

Revisiting the theory of change

Valuing Volunteering Philippines sessions with a working group of staff and volunteers in TMO to examine the relationships between volunteer inputs and ultimate programme objectives around resilient coral reefs and socio-economic benefits for communities identified two pathways of influence. The first pathway to impact is expected to be determined by increases in awareness that lead to behaviour change, both in Tubbataha and local fishing grounds. The second pathway to impact is via the provision of positive volunteer opportunities that encourage young people to become future advocates for environmental issues.

At the end of the research process we were able to look at the findings generated by our inquiries in light of the assumptions in this theory of change. Key learning points include:

- The link between volunteer-led education and improvements in knowledge and awareness at the community level should be verified.
- Closing the gap in knowledge and understanding seemed to be contingent on volunteers' creative and interactive delivery, their personal characteristics (e.g. being young and knowledgeable about the environment) and the support they received from TMO.
- Even when volunteer educators are successful at raising awareness, there is no guarantee this will trigger behaviour change. Understanding may be a necessary condition but it is not a sufficient one.
- A systemic view of poverty highlights the numerous constraints within and from outside communities that prevent shifts in behaviour. This raises important questions for the role of volunteerism in environmental management, once knowledge and awareness is high.
- The links between positive volunteer experiences and future environmental advocacy were supported by our research findings. Important factors like training, support and practice triggered a number of psychological and social mechanisms (e.g. increases in confidence and happiness), which made it more likely volunteers would inform others and stay engaged in environmental issues.

The resulting 'theory of change' diagram in the accompanying case study report should be a useful contribution to the volunteering and environmental sectors by providing a comparative visual map that other programmes can use to inform and understand their awareness-raising/educational programmes.

Reflections on process

We found the exercise of integrating systemic action research into monitoring processes not only allows a programme to prove its case but also to improve its operations in the future. The research shows the importance of re-evaluating the purpose, focus and role of volunteers in environmental education programmes at regular intervals and from different perspectives. Environmental education needs to adapt to the specific contexts of communities and changing external circumstances, making use of volunteerism in different ways. A positive organisational culture within TMO towards learning meant that time was committed from busy schedules to interpret and discuss research findings. This helped the process of reflection, opening up possibility spaces for innovation around the use of volunteers in environmental change efforts.

Key implications

Support volunteer educators to improve the link between knowledge and action

The research identified that even when environmental education is effectively delivered by volunteers to address inequality of access to information, we cannot assume this new knowledge will lead to behaviour change. In reality, decisions to engage in pro-environmental behaviours are more sensitive to socio-economic constraints than accurate knowledge and information. This reality needs to be more explicitly addressed in the way volunteering programmes use volunteers in environmental and social change initiatives.

Advance volunteer-led environmental education for practical applications

Initiatives looking to support community change require an approach to education that differs from straightforward knowledge transfer. Volunteer educators who support behaviour change may need to be more hands-on, connecting environmental knowledge to clear avenues for action at the community level. This has implications for the way organisations use volunteering for educational purposes. For example, the deployment of volunteers to practical models of education may be more effective in supporting more people to become effective, adaptive and self-reliant change agents.

Integrate systemic research and community insights into volunteer programme monitoring

The research shows the importance of re-evaluating the purpose, focus and role of volunteers in environmental education programmes at regular intervals and from different perspectives. These learning opportunities can be used to encourage continual improvements to volunteer activity based on locally grounded explanations about what is changing, what remains the same, and why.

Riding the waves of change: the challenges of volunteering in highly complex poverty contexts

Reporting on action research among volunteers in Mangingisda, Palawan

The coastal ecosystems of the Philippines are some of the most heavily fished areas in the world. The impacts on poverty are great. The 2 million small-scale fishers, representing 85% of the fishing population, are the poorest. And yet, most government subsidies are aimed at aquaculture and commercial fishers in order to increase production, leaving few options for small-scale fishers, especially when limited education prevents opportunities to engage in other livelihoods.

In 2013, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* carried out a participatory systemic inquiry with TMO under the guiding objective of the Valuing Volunteering project to understand how, when and why volunteering affects poverty. The inquiry revealed volunteer work to educate communities on the links between marine ecosystem conservation and socio-economic security has successfully improved awareness and understanding, but behaviour has proved difficult to change. An unanswered question for the TMO staff working group in this research, was “Where people are all aware, what next?”

This question prompted a more detailed action research inquiry in one coastal community, Mangingisda in Palawan, by a group of international, national, local and resident volunteers. Our collectively generated framework for action had three main components:

- ecology (to protect the fish stocks)
- livelihoods (to provide alternative ways of generating income)
- volunteerism (to direct human resources towards the first two).

The action research inquiry

This piece of action research set out to do two key things:

1. support further learning for TMO’s volunteering and environmental education programmes and assist the community of Mangingisda to overcome barriers to development (see above)
2. generate learning about the practicalities of adopting action research as an approach which can identify and respond to strengths and limitations of volunteering for poverty alleviation and development at the community level.

For the first objective, the aim was to infuse a range of participatory methodologies with a systemic perspective to support a situated understanding about what to do and how to go about it. The idea was to provide a learning architecture for TMO and the community of Mangingisda to consider what the next steps should be for volunteering programmes that have successfully achieved awareness-raising objectives on the links between environment and poverty.

For the second objective we were interested to answer questions like:

- What can systemic learning processes bring to the organisation of volunteer efforts?
- What value do volunteers bring when working in a participatory way?
- Are experimental learning cycles a useful way to structure volunteering for development?

The action research inquiry took place over 18 months, beginning in September 2012 and ending in April 2014. Research took place over four stages. Participatory systemic inquiry (stage one) and a multi-stakeholder analysis (stage two) enabled us to ground the research in local concerns. Stages three and four involved continuous cycles of learning in which reflection informed action, and action informed the next round of reflection.

This summary is different to the other case studies that make up the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* research because it emphasises what was learned from the action research process. The accompanying case study is written as a practical learning tool, documenting our journey as action researchers in Barangay Mangingisda, trying to leverage the power of volunteering to support poverty alleviation. It provides a stage-by-stage account of our approach and the decisions we took, in the methodology section. It details the key practical learning points about our process and also the findings which capture the enabling characteristics and limitations of volunteering as a tool to support people in high-poverty environments to “ride the waves of change”.

Process learning

Seeing the whole. Participatory systemic inquiry created a clear picture of the community’s context and challenges to inform a collectively generated framework for action and next steps. Mapping the insights of multiple stakeholders helped all the volunteers to see a good proportion of the whole social, ecological and economic system – and the links between them. At times this meant intentionally moving information on the map from one stakeholder to the next to try and unearth blockages preventing transformative change for the community of Mangingisda. This systemic analysis grounded our framework for action in an in-depth understanding of the local context.

Supporting people living in poverty to participate in volunteering. We followed some emergent lines of inquiry around the reticence of resident volunteers to get involved and the reasons development initiatives had failed in the past, which provided new insights into the factors that would contribute to project success and sustainability. Financial instruments seemed to be an important complement to the capacity-building and social mobilisation work of volunteers in high-poverty contexts where the risks of experimenting can be deemed too high. There is not a direct link, however, between being able to see these potential levers for change and having the individual or organisational capacity to construct a course of action that is responsive to local realities. In our experience, proper compensation for resident volunteers in the early stages of engagement was difficult to find. This has implications for the design of volunteering interventions and accompanying project budgets if people living in poverty are to be properly supported to participate in their own development.

The challenges of turning ideas into action. Having ideas and acting on them are two different activities, which require different capacities and levels of commitment. Transitioning to a different livelihood has an inbuilt complexity which requires a steadfastness that has to be learned. In these contexts, volunteers coming from the outside have the potential to take on a role as social mobilisers within wider multidisciplinary teams. This presence can support communities to translate different ways of seeing the world into a conviction to do something about it. Everyone is capable of change but some are more practised than others. We all need a set of experiences that we can draw from to believe our efforts will prove productive in the end. This is where platforms for volunteering can add value, by creating opportunities to practise change and learn about change processes.

The need for change in our relationships and networks. Developing individual capacity was important for infusing energy into the change process, but for cultural reasons it came with limited guarantee that this would spill over to improve collective capacities. Volunteers may have to work at the individual and collective level to support capacities for change. Similarly, change for Mangingisda was dependent on extending the boundary of volunteer work to institutions outside the community. The use of our own capital as ‘outside’ volunteers to connect the community to local organisations highlighted how connections to institutions can serve communities in poverty only insofar as they can respond to local realities. Otherwise, they can perpetuate community problems, reducing local capacity for change rather than adding to it. This raised implications for the way partners and volunteers are selected, as well as important questions about where volunteer efforts are directed.

Findings about volunteer effectiveness

The value of different volunteers. Different volunteers bring their own strengths to the change effort, hence the value of having multidisciplinary volunteer teams. By mixing different educational backgrounds, cultural perspectives and life experiences we were able to increase our chances of finding a solution that worked. The overall contribution of volunteers to the change process intersects with individual variability in terms of commitment and approach to participatory and collaborative working. The poorest volunteers were most undervalued in the change effort, both in terms of financial support and in their own assessment of their capabilities.

The length of volunteer engagements. Volunteers supported by the Valuing Volunteering project have been able to support social mobilisation at the community level, but the learning opportunities and resulting capacities have not been able to overcome the financial barriers to economic advancement that resident volunteers still face. The long-term nature of change has implications for the length of volunteering placements.

A social mobilisation role for volunteering in the wider development landscape. Through our work as volunteers, we were able to work alongside people in poverty and experience first-hand the barriers that local institutions have created through their approach to development. While volunteering, like any development intervention, is not a silver bullet, it did provide a platform for mobilising human resources to realise ideas and collective plans.

Key implications

Use systemic analysis to inform programming

We were able to demonstrate how important clarity about a community’s context and associated challenges was to the change process, and how quickly such data can be collected and analysed locally. Systemic analysis can be used to generate locally situated insights about the levers for change that will be most effective for volunteers to pursue in placement.

Use volunteering to create momentum in change initiatives

It can be difficult to create and sustain a momentum that will carry people over the hurdle between ideas and action to grapple with the complexity of change issues. Volunteers provide a social mobilisation role that could be used more strategically in development initiatives.

Share the risks of experimentation

Our action research with people living in poverty highlighted the level of risk that accompanies change initiatives. Volunteering efforts, like any development intervention, do not come with iron-clad guarantees of success. Supporting communities to make transitions involves sharing the risk. Social mobilisation and capacity building on the part of volunteers may need to be accompanied by adequately financed projects to reduce risk for communities so they can dedicate the time to learn through their own practice and experience.

Views from the watershed: how citizens and actors describe volunteering for development

Reporting on the contribution of volunteering for natural resource management in Carood watershed, Bohol

It is communities living in poverty that tend to be most dependent on the services provided by natural ecosystems for their day-to-day livelihoods. The management of natural resources at appropriate ecological scales (such as a watershed) creates challenges for the social change processes required to initiate and sustain better outcomes. It is not just a technical exercise but a human one, which requires getting various individuals, groups and organisations to work collaboratively toward achieving a complex set of objectives. This summary and its accompanying case study explores what role volunteerism can play at the intersection between environment, poverty and vulnerability across different geographical zones – e.g. from upland to coastal communities. VSO and its in-country federated member VSO Bahaginan have been working through volunteers to support the management of the Carood watershed in Bohol, Visayas, since 2010. The combination of volunteers (e.g. international, diaspora, national, local) working in Carood and the ready availability of theories of change operating at the local, programme and country level made the watershed a rich canvas to explore the ecosystem of volunteering as it relates to social and environmental change.

The inquiry is wide-ranging, spanning a year and incorporating multiple community engagements. In the context of the overarching research question guiding the *Valuing Volunteering* project, “How, when and why does volunteering affect poverty?”, it took a number of different directions over its course. The questions we started with included:

1. What is changing in the watershed because of volunteering?
 - How is volunteering supporting management of natural resources?
 - Have communities become active in their own development?
2. How is volunteering being used as a change strategy?
 - What are theories of change/strategies/power/resource flows influencing decisions about volunteering in the watershed?
3. How are volunteers working to affect change?
 - How is volunteering experienced by different actors locally?
 - What are the pathways/mechanisms that make volunteering effective?

By starting from a citizens’ view of volunteering, we have been able to identify important assumptions in programmatic thinking from the position of those who do the work and those who should benefit most from its impact.

Findings

Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work.

The integration of poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work has been achieved to differing degrees across the watershed. Identifying a location that has poor people living in it doesn’t mean volunteers will automatically bump up against them in their work, nor succeed in impacting their lives in a positive way. Working to support the interests of people typically excluded from the formal governance or management processes has to be explicitly designed into volunteering initiatives (e.g. through supporting volunteers to navigate language barriers or financial limitations). Local strategic frameworks are not sufficient to effectively channel volunteer activities towards poverty impacts just by mentioning economic outcomes, especially when the priority-setting process is neither democratic nor inclusive.

For people living in poverty, some of the value of volunteering is attributed to being linked to people and organisations perceived to be important by local decision-makers and community members. Volunteers coming from outside the watershed have a particular role to play in uniting people and mobilising local activity. Not all follow-up actions initiated by communities take place close to the point of a volunteer intervention and it is possible to see the cumulative impact of volunteer efforts over time, especially in capacity building. This can be a slow process, taking 8–12 months from exposure to the work of outside volunteers to locally initiated implementation of ideas. Initiatives then had to be perceived as a success to start to change people’s minds about their own and others’ capabilities. Sometimes wider systemic forces (e.g. a change of political leadership) can derail good efforts along the way. These findings have implications for the way geographical, financial and evaluation parameters of volunteering programmes affect where volunteers concentrate their efforts. The distinction between whether volunteers work ‘wide’ across many locations, actors and outcomes or ‘deep’ with more intensity and focus seems to be particularly important.

Volunteering is a social activity, contingent on relationships.

Volunteers work by intentionally building relationships. They depend on these relationships to be effective in their work and also to sustain their motivation, keeping them active and engaged. Active improvement of social and communication skills and networks is an important step for improving volunteering for development outcomes. When we think about how we ‘do’ and support volunteering, it may be more accurate to think of it as a social activity than an individual effort. Getting the social networks and sets of relationships in a change context working is as important a task as mobilising local volunteers or getting volunteers from outside into placement.

When volunteers work at cross-purposes. Increasing emphasis is being given to capacity building in volunteering for development, particularly through the placement of volunteers with organisations and institutional partners. This can move volunteers from the front line of poverty alleviation work with communities. This may create impact so long as those organisations and institutions are fit for purpose as far as poverty and inequality outcomes are concerned. This is why monitoring systems are needed that can inform volunteer programming based on a community perspective about how and why change is happening. When partners are not working to support pro-poor development, volunteers can play an important role as allies to marginalised and excluded groups, lending credibility to their concerns and priorities with more powerful local actors. In these situations volunteers may need extra support to navigate local power struggles and highly politicised contexts.

Working in politically sensitive environments. International and local volunteers alike are affected by the politicisation of their work. Management of environmental resources is not a politically neutral activity, especially when decisions have clear winners and losers, as in the case of some private–public partnerships. Volunteering for asset reform and active citizenship to support collective action on the part of poor communities is not always in the interest of local power holders. This can manifest through organisational work cultures and highly political environments which prevent action from being taken even on issues hindering the change process. Volunteers from outside can gain some traction when they become trusted allies of people living in poverty, whose experience in other contexts can be used by communities to influence decisions. The added value brought by volunteers in long negotiation processes raises questions about the importance of organisational support structures and training that enables volunteers to work safely and effectively in these contentious spaces.

How the governance system of local partners influences volunteering. VSO and other development organisations working through volunteers engage local partners to manage and support the work of volunteers. The organisation of partners and decision-making bodies can look representative of poor and marginalised groups on paper but struggle to meet basic requirements of good governance such as participation, inclusiveness and collaboration. The internal processes of development organisations can unintentionally undermine good governance practice. Volunteers can make improvements in governance but it takes time. Levels of active engagement and capacity among local partners also affect the speed of learning and innovation as well as the motivation of local and outsider volunteers.

Community perceptions of volunteer programmes affect the trajectory of development efforts. Misunderstandings among communities about what volunteers bring to development challenges are commonplace and often cause communities to be resistant to change. Factors that can constrain the work of volunteers (e.g. individual skill limitations, funder interests) frequently remain opaque to people who have no experience of how the international development system works. The consequence can be confusion and disillusionment. It is easier to show people how the volunteering system works by inviting them to actively participate with volunteers in development efforts. But this approach assumes a willingness on the part of the community to engage in the first place. An iterative approach to community development may have to actively build this interest, which takes time and initiative on the part of volunteers. It can challenge volunteers' own perceptions of what they will be able to achieve during placement.

The benefits and burdens of participating in volunteering. There is an inequality in how volunteering is experienced in the watershed. The burdens of participating in volunteering are greatest for the least financially secure stakeholders active in the change process. On the whole, volunteers on VSO's ICS volunteer programme are positively affected by their experience. Learning from the programme highlights how important support structures are for creating opportunities for self-reflection and group learning, which makes for greater personal growth and more effective change agents. By contrast, local volunteers are much less likely to have the material or psychosocial resources or support infrastructure to meet the demands that volunteering places on them. They are less likely to realise the benefits of volunteering afforded to volunteers in structured programmes. This is a missed opportunity to nurture local capacities for stewarding social and environmental change that can reduce poverty and inequality.

How learning systems help volunteering innovation and improvement. Learning systems are critical to development processes. Volunteer interventions are no exception. Without spaces to reflect at the programme, volunteer and community level, opportunities are lost to innovate and improve. Three-month review processes in the ICS volunteer programme have enabled informed decision making about what to change and what to keep the same. Valuing Volunteering Philippines has shown how it is possible to embed ethnographically informed methods, participatory approaches and systems thinking into day-to-day project work to enable greater community focus in volunteer interventions. Informal learning spaces (e.g. conversations) help communities to think through how to use volunteering as a tool for their own development, improving local agency and engagement in the change process.

Reflections on process

Through conducting our inquiries, the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project found and created spaces for people to learn together. We were able to generate evidence that people felt confident about acting to improve volunteer programme effectiveness. But to get going we had to focus on building relationships and carrying out research into how change relevant to people happens. Participatory systemic action research relies on careful facilitation of a positive learning culture to ensure it gives people the confidence to stay engaged during significant, and sometimes uncomfortable, adjustments in thinking. Young people and locally embedded researchers bring attributes of particular value to systemic and collective learning processes.

Key implications

Improve volunteer programme design

Valuing Volunteering Philippines learned how the processes (e.g. recruitment) and constraints (e.g. funding) of volunteering programmes can put a strain on local resources, leaving high-priority work within the community, such as livelihood development for farmers, under-resourced. At the same time volunteers can encourage collaborative working and infuse development processes with much-needed energy. Given the way volunteers work (e.g. through relationship building) and the complex nature of the issues they are usually deployed to assist with, they may be more suited to working 'deep' rather than 'wide' with communities. There is scope to integrate volunteers into existing development programmes, especially when technical aspects of development would be enhanced by a human touch.

Reimagine volunteering as a social activity

Volunteers rarely do effective work on their own. They affect poverty through the formal and informal relationships that they create. This relational approach can help bridge different actors and support multi-stakeholder collaboration towards the same objective. Yet recruitment processes, placement descriptions and volunteer support systems are usually designed to serve individuals, not teams. Volunteering for development would be more effective if it could elevate the importance of relationships in volunteer recruitment and training, as well as support the ongoing participation of local actors who become inspired and active through their engagement with volunteers.

Make volunteer work accountable to the realities of poverty

Increasing emphasis is being given to capacity building in volunteering for development, particularly through the placement of volunteers with organisations and institutional partners. This can move volunteers from the front line of poverty alleviation work with communities. This may create impact so long as those organisations and institutions are fit for purpose as far as poverty and inequality outcomes are concerned. This is why monitoring systems are needed that can inform volunteer programming based on a community perspective about how and why change is happening. When partners are not working to support pro-poor development, volunteers can play an important role as allies to marginalised and excluded groups, lending credibility to their concerns and priorities with more powerful local actors. In these situations volunteers may need extra support to navigate local power struggles and highly politicised contexts.

Use volunteer placements as an opportunity to improve governance and participation

The mobilisation and placement of volunteers to do a job has limited impact on poverty when these efforts are persistently undermined by political and organisational systems of governance that reinforce poor development outcomes. The way volunteer-involving organisations, and volunteers themselves, engage with local partners and decision-makers is an opportunity to incentivise a different approach to governance and participation.

Enhance community-level understanding about the role of volunteering in development

There are widespread misconceptions about the role of volunteering in development, which affects how volunteers are perceived and how their efforts are interpreted at the community level. This in turn can affect a volunteer's own wellbeing and motivation, which in turn affects the change they can bring about. Beliefs, attitudes and perceptions are not easy to change through dialogue alone and may require greater interaction on the part of development organisations to support communities to identify when and in what ways volunteers can be of help to them.

Reduce the inequality of benefits experienced through participation in volunteering

The individual benefits of volunteering become development impacts when personal journeys taken through volunteering enable people to become self-assured and purposeful change agents. The wider social impact of these benefits is limited (and may increase inequality) when this experience is only afforded to volunteers on structured programmes and not to local volunteers who join the change effort.

Volunteering for gown and town: learning and change beyond the university's walls

Reporting on the ways university volunteering affects poverty

In December 2012, for the first time, the NCEAV saw academic institutions, civil society organisations and government agencies from the three main island groups – Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao – come together to discuss university volunteering for development.

There was an interest in understanding when and how volunteering extends beyond personal impacts to societal ones. Contributing to the central *Valuing Volunteering* research question, 'How, when and why does volunteering affect poverty?', *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* was particularly interested in answering the following questions:

- What kind of social change does university volunteering lead to and how do these changes contribute to poverty alleviation?
- What kind of university-enabled volunteering is most effective at supporting poverty alleviation and sustainable development?
- What can be learned from this sector to inform volunteering initiatives more widely in the Philippines?

This summary and the accompanying case study pulls together the learning of six interlinked inquiries with public and private universities in the Philippines, including Ateneo University, UP Los Baños, Bicol University, Bohol Island State University, Xavier University and Miriam College. Undertaken between July 2012 and October 2013, each inquiry lasted two to four days, and involved working with volunteer support staff, university volunteers and community members to learn how change happens, and reflect on what works and doesn't work within a particular context.

Findings

Improving the lives of people living in poverty. We found university volunteers can create a number of changes in communities which should help with alleviating poverty. Some of the volunteer programmes we reviewed resulted in greater self-reliance and self-direction on the part of the community, but this happened slowly and over time. It was harder to see impact from one-time activities in communities, such as annual tutorials or gift-giving.

Relationships make the transfer of technical expertise more responsive to community needs. University volunteers hold a privileged position in society. They have the means to access the latest knowledge, thinking and learning facilities in ways that people living in disadvantaged communities cannot. The research indicates that effective volunteers are encouraged to intentionally build relationships. Relationships are recognised as an important part of the change process because they make it possible to gain the trust of the community. This trust gains volunteers access to contextual information that helps volunteers to tailor their support and technical input to community needs. The more immersed the volunteer is in community life, the faster this process becomes.

A unique role for universities in shaping a social context that supports pro-poor development. Alongside making tangible changes through specific volunteering activities and projects, we learned that universities can influence development that is pro-poor by acting as a bridge, linking marginalised communities to services and decision-makers, lending legitimacy to the concerns and actions of communities, and providing a steady presence that is unwavering through the journey of change. These contributions provide additional support to communities struggling to escape poverty and right social injustices. The commitment required to support this sort of social change is made possible by the nature of universities as geographically and socially established institutions which can provide stability, credibility and a steady supply of volunteers.

Features of the university system limit effectiveness of volunteer programmes. University volunteer programmes are intended as a force for poverty alleviation and national development. There is a gap, however, between this rhetoric and the design of volunteer programmes to fit features of the university system. This means programmes cannot tailor volunteer interventions to get to the root causes of issues. Communities can be left feeling like social laboratories, and saturation of volunteering activity reduces their receptiveness. The consequence is a trend of greater accountability to the volunteer and wider university institution than to the community the volunteers work with.

Strategies for increasing a community focus in university volunteer programmes. It always seemed to be the case that those spearheading volunteer and extension programmes had a challenging time navigating institutional constraints to convince staff and students to engage in community work and to do so meaningfully. Universities trying to tackle this head-on emphasised social justice as a strong institutional value, as with Ateneo universities and Miriam College. Bicol University operationalised a commitment to community development in its strategic plan for 2003–13. Strategies for increasing a community focus involved hiring staff with community development expertise, collaborating with community-level partners such as NGOs, and training and orientation for staff and student volunteers.

A failure to learn about what works prevents improvements and excellence in volunteer programme design. Community development work is complex and does not follow a fixed trajectory. A lot of volunteering is iterative and experimental in nature, making it a natural accompaniment to social change work. People work with their best intentions and resources to try and solve an issue or problem. They give things a go, but there is little follow-up on the part of volunteers or volunteer programmes to check on the changes that have occurred in the lives of people living in poverty. Most of the universities we engaged – and whom we would consider in large part to be front-runners in the sector – highlighted standardised measurement and evaluation as a challenge area in reflection sessions. Limited practice around measuring what has changed for people and communities affects how helpful university volunteering is as a tool for development.

In exploring the links between volunteering, active citizenship and poverty alleviation we look at three additional themes:

The relationship between volunteer mobilisation and active citizenship. There is a distinction between unconscious, involuntary or coerced behaviour and intentional action where the person demonstrates a control or guidance over their own behaviour. We found the relationship between mobilising people to volunteer and active citizenship is not straightforward. It is more than possible for students and faculty staff to go through the motions of community engagement activities to meet formal curriculum and institutional requirements or informal expectations of others without the accompanying spirit of volunteerism. This mindless or 'empty' volunteering misses an emotional and intellectual connection to the change process. It can affect volunteer motivation and community willingness to persist with development concerns.

The wellbeing experienced by volunteers can affect who gets to volunteer and what kind of contribution they make. The quality of the volunteering experience affects whether volunteers sustain their efforts during and beyond a structured programme. Positive experiences are not necessarily easy experiences. It seems that immersive and long-term commitments are more demanding but also the most rewarding and life-changing, especially when supported through relationships. Negative experiences threaten volunteer wellbeing, especially when under-funded university volunteering programmes drive students into further financial hardship and exclude people from engaging.

One-way relationships slow the change process, excluding a role for community members as active citizens. The relationships volunteers foster with communities can take many forms. In one-way relationships knowledge and resources are imparted to communities instead of co-constructed. One-way giving reinforces the distinction between the 'helper' and the 'helped'. Over time this negatively affects how individuals and communities see their own roles in the change process. When this happens, volunteer initiatives may have added a human resource (in the form of the volunteer's efforts) but they have also taken a human resource away (in the form of the community's efforts). Incorporating a wider definition of 'active citizen' into volunteer programmes, which extends beyond the university volunteer, can help universities extend the impact of their work on poverty.

Revisiting the theory of change

The research did not begin with a blank canvas. Its initial inquiries were able to compile a working theory of change about how actors in the sector think university volunteering contributes to poverty alleviation and national development. We identified two main routes to impact. The first pathway represents the use of volunteer action to directly improve the lives of communities. The second pathway represents the use of volunteer action to awaken an educated cohort to the realities of poverty and inequality in order to create a more active citizenry on development issues.

At the end of the research process we were able to look at the findings generated by our inquiries in light of the assumptions in this theory of change. Key learning points include:

- The assumption that volunteering leads to poverty alleviation in the first pathway needs to be more than a leap of faith, so as not to exploit or further marginalise the poorest. For example, institutional factors can prevent a much-needed community focus in university volunteer work.
- The value that university volunteering programmes bring, in terms of transfer of technical capacities, is highly contingent on the quality of volunteer–community relationships.
- Alongside project-specific benefits, university volunteering programmes can provide additional solidarity and 'symbolic capital' to communities they choose to partner with, especially because of their social standing in Filipino society and their security as established institutions.
- There is scope to widen a role for student and staff-led advocacy within volunteering programmes.
- The links between volunteer action, active citizenship and poverty alleviation in the second pathway are not spontaneous either. It is possible to go through the motions of volunteer activity without establishing an emotional or intellectual connection with the process.
- The way volunteering practice is constructed determines whether people continue to engage in development efforts after a structured opportunity comes to an end.
- Volunteer programmes have a better chance of affecting poverty if they also mobilise citizens within communities to work side-by-side with university volunteers.

Key implications

Clarify what the sector is looking for volunteering to achieve

Poverty alleviation is not synonymous with national development. The objectives of national development schemes often adversely affect the poorest and most marginalised. The academic and volunteering sectors need to consider what sort of progress we should be measuring volunteering programmes against, distinguishing temporary fixes from efforts which tackle social injustice.

Recognise that technical skills transfer relies on quality relationships

The value of university volunteering as a conduit of theoretical knowledge and specialisms is only translated into community impact through effective relationships. Without relationships founded on mutual respect, trust and understanding, it is difficult for university volunteers to transfer technical expertise in ways that are appropriate and well received by communities.

Improve capacity to learn about impact

When learning about impact does not take place, volunteering becomes a mindless activity of mobilising human resources rather than a strategic tool for purposeful change.

Increase a community focus in volunteering programmes

University volunteer programmes do better at providing avenues for students to develop their skills and dissertations than affecting poverty. Academic and community priorities need to be balanced by increasing a focus on community change in programme design. This requires a significant shift from focusing on the needs of the student or staff to starting with what the community of actors as a whole wants to achieve.

Work to a broader definition of active citizenship

A lot of volunteering in universities is formally attached to opportunities provided by the institution. These are good platforms for exposure, but by themselves these activities do not guarantee volunteers will continue to be active in development concerns. Self-directed and inclusive active citizenship, which includes the volunteer actions of communities, needs to be actively enabled by university volunteering programmes.

Adequately fund volunteer programmes

Volunteering does not come for free without exploiting volunteers or communities. The research finds that the most satisfying and life-changing experiences are not the easiest. They require adequate financial and practical support.

5. Reflections on process

This section summarises some of *Valuing Volunteering Philippines'* own learning from using systemic action research as an approach to understanding and improving impact. We have selected the insights that we think will be most useful to the volunteering, development and government sectors in the Philippines.

Involve local people in learning processes

Having local people on your research (or monitoring) teams is really useful. They can interpret local situations and comments more accurately. They have relationships with people to help facilitate meetings. They have historical knowledge about volunteering in their place, which makes it possible for them to identify long-term and unintended impacts. They can help communicate changes to programmes, which are not always understood by people at the local level. As well as improving the quality of the insights, involving local people also serves to transfer capacities for learning about volunteering as a tool for development so this expertise is not only accumulating among one or two individuals at the programmatic level.

Learning through action research requires practice

Having gone through the process of training people to use participatory approaches, we cannot emphasise enough the value of practice for the facilitators. Handbooks are useful reference guides but it is not the same as using the techniques first-hand. As with any skill, action research requires practice and time for people to unlearn existing habits of thinking and doing before trusting in themselves and the approach. At the point of implementation, people can be quite unsure about approaching people in the street or facilitating full community sessions, which often requires an element of improvisation. The group planning and reflection sessions that we positioned either side of sessions helped people to review what went well and what could have gone better. This process meant they could visualise how to do it next time.

Young people were particularly adept at picking up new techniques and remaining flexible in their outlook about the direction their inquiries took. They didn't need to start with a predefined set of questions. They were happy to act like investigative journalists, seeing what threads of information emerged and following them up to probe more. It was still unnerving for young people when community experiences and locally grounded insights went against what local officials or the programme thinks. This is when positive organisational cultures around learning can empower people to put what they have gleaned into practice.

Time and resource has to be given, therefore, to developing cultures and aptitudes for action research. During the research process, *Valuing Volunteering* learned of ambitions among players in the volunteering sector for a Learning Hub. This would be an ideal vehicle to promote and up-skill volunteer programmes in how to incorporate participatory and iterative learning processes into their volunteering projects and programmes.

Making use of informal learning spaces

There is an assumption that reflecting on impact requires a long process of research and reporting that people don't have time for. This depends on what you want the findings for. If the value in the exercise for you is in touching base to learn from people's experiences about how things are going, you can design the reporting process any way that best supports learning for your programme. For example, some of the most valuable feedback mechanisms in our research were informal conversations taking place over lunch, over dinner, while swimming, while traveling, mangrove planting, and at community events. Being strategically opportunistic about using spaces to share information was dependent on the lead researcher being present in the community to take up invitations and opportunities. This was easier over extended visits because evenings and weekends could be used. It was more difficult during short visits with a packed schedule. This insight may have implications for the way volunteer-involving organisations do monitoring work.

We maintain that some of the most powerful insights came from making the time to all get in a room together to have a conversation. To navigate potential power dynamics, we worked with volunteer support staff, volunteers and different community groups separately. This helped us create a space where people could talk freely. The findings were anonymised on systems maps (see individual Case Study reports) and we invited everyone to come together to reflect on them. While organising this last session can be more difficult to achieve practically, as there are more diaries to coordinate, we really felt the richest reflections and ideas emerged from multi-stakeholder sessions.

Action research challenges the status quo

Some of the principles underpinning the research (e.g. that it needs to prioritise relationship building, feedback and a multi-stakeholder approach) sound innocuous enough. But putting them into practice counters existing trends within the Philippines and globally both for doing social research and doing development. It requires a commitment to addressing power dynamics and a belief that the best analysis of situations is arrived at from making sense of issues together. Sometimes, our efforts were challenged by leaders who like to direct rather than listen; hospitable individuals who elevated us to special status; experienced professionals reluctant to embrace a different way of working; and exceptionally low levels of confidence among people in poverty to trust in their observations and ideas. In addition, the process of examining root causes and effects demands deep thinking and levels of critical reflection which people are not always used to doing. At some point during an action research process an individual's, community's or organisation's assumptions are going to be challenged. This can be unnerving and socially uncomfortable, especially when it rocks the foundations of people's belief systems.

Navigating these sorts of issues required a conscious effort to re-work social situations and interactions to create safe and positive spaces for learning. When it works, it means all stakeholders are supported to learn, which builds capacities across the system about how, when and why volunteering makes a difference. It models a different set of social relationships and norms for carrying out development work.

Action research as a tool for change

The emphasis given in action research to involving everyone as co-participants is not just about respectfully keeping people informed. It is about giving people a reason to feel their contribution is important and that progress is being made. Used in this way, learning architectures can inject much-needed momentum into change processes. The learning process can become a source of confidence about how to move forward. For example, as a result of participating in action research, community members are more able to visualise what an alternative scenario might look like. Volunteers experience more agency when dealing with individuals/organisations in positions of power because, having had time to reflect and understand how local systems operate, they feel more sure-footed about how they are using their time. And finally, development programmes can feel more assured in their conversations with funders that project designs are well informed as a result of the learning cycles in place. Viewed in this way, investment in good-quality learning processes becomes an investment in the change process itself. It complements rather than distracts from all the existing resource committed to recruiting and placing volunteers.

6. Conclusion

This research was designed to be a tool for learning for the volunteering, development and government sectors to strengthen how impact is framed and anticipated in decisions to deploy and enable volunteers. By starting from a citizens' view of volunteering for development we have been able to identify important assumptions in programmatic thinking from the position of those who do the work and those who should benefit most from its impact.

Supporting change to happen in complex poverty environments is a slow process. We found that volunteers lend much-needed energy to development journeys. Through fostering relationships built on solidarity, shared experiences and a motivation to work for the common good, volunteers can become important allies to people living in poverty. If fully maximised, the links volunteering creates between marginalised communities and socially respected institutions (e.g. universities, NGOs) can legitimise marginalised concerns and improve support for pro-poor development. This role is particularly important in communities that have been negatively affected by national development efforts and who lack the knowledge and self-belief to approach government departments and other powerful decision-makers on their own.

But the relationship between volunteering for development initiatives and tangible change for marginalised and excluded groups is not automatic. Efforts on the part of volunteers to strengthen social mobilisation and its associated capacities for development are an important piece of the puzzle. But they are not always sufficient to singularly respond to the scale of the development challenges some communities are facing in the Philippines. In our exploration of contexts, dynamics and experiences of volunteering we find the complexities of change often defy the logical assumptions articulated in our theories of change. For example the deployment of volunteers for education and awareness raising does not lead to environmental change without additional inputs (e.g. financial resources, local leadership) to support the development of workable alternatives for people living in poverty.

Our research indicates how global and top-down programmatic theories of change find it difficult to capture how volunteers work in a particular situation. In addition they can neglect the considerable local resource that goes into making volunteer placements work and they assume communities know how to best make use of volunteers. When too removed from realities on the ground the risk is that predetermined project parameters misalign with local priorities, distracting resources away from work areas that are more fundamental or relevant to alleviating poverty. The reliance that development organisations working through volunteers place on partners and their local strategic frameworks to guide volunteering for development is highly contingent on local capacities to identify what needs to happen, the order in which it needs to happen and when volunteering can help. Even when this is working well, volunteer-involving organisations need their institutional processes to be flexible and funding streams to be responsive.

The use of volunteering as a platform for nurturing an active citizenry able and willing to commit effort to development concerns is equally contingent on how volunteering is organised and supported, both at the programme and community level. For example, we learned that to do is not always to understand. Platforms for volunteering that intentionally create reflexive spaces support volunteers to form an emotional and intellectual connection with their actions and their effects on the wider world. This is an essential ingredient in volunteering programmes because action that is meaningful and purposeful to all those involved – including people living in poverty – is more likely to be sustained. This approach to volunteering is noticeably distinct from perceptions of “volunteering as charity” and much more in line with traditional values of mutuality and reciprocity which characterise pre-colonial expressions of citizenship. When volunteering programmes are constructed around individuals rather than relational networks of change actors (e.g. multidisciplinary teams) they often overlook a critical stakeholder for sustainability: people living in poverty who want to join the change efforts but who need viable and meaningful ways of doing so.

Lastly, the matching of human resources to complex change environments takes practice. Every new situation (e.g. renewed cycles of volunteers, unexpected events like natural disasters or changes in local leadership) creates a different set of demands on support staff, volunteers, local partners and community members. It is helpful, therefore, to view the practice of volunteering for development as an ongoing process of reflection and experimentation where all stakeholders in the change effort are recognised and encouraged to learn from one another.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has demonstrated how it is possible to use participatory tools to encourage systemic thinking at the volunteer, community and programme level to gain clarity about the relationship between intention, action and outcome. We found young people are especially adept at approaching inquiry work with a flexibility and openness that enables insights and research directions to be truly informed by what people experience. Our work with TMO highlighted the value of positive organisational cultures around creativity and learning for volunteering programmes. Rather than just fix errors under current programmatic thinking, we were able to meaningfully discuss surprising insights and unexpected connections, opening up possibility spaces for innovation.

7. Key implications

This section links some of the cross-cutting insights from the case studies and general project learning into a set of suggestions, ideas and statements for further discussion by actors looking to strengthen the contribution of volunteerism to poverty alleviation and development in the Philippines. They offer insights about when volunteering works best, how we should think about volunteering for development, and what needs to be done to enhance its contribution.

When volunteering works best

From mobilising to moving with purpose

In a cultural context which celebrates the spirit of volunteerism, the Philippines is in a strong position to mobilise its citizens in the fight against poverty and inequality. At the same time, attention is needed to assess the quality and direction of volunteer efforts. One-time efforts or activity that never gets to the root causes of poverty are not effective from a development perspective. For example, we learned how volunteers are often used to bring new perspectives and ideas into communities. This is an ingredient of change, but we couldn't find evidence of an automatic link between seeing the world differently and actively doing something about it, especially when wider constraints prevent community progress towards viable alternatives. Volunteering programmes need to think about the conditions and complementary interventions that need to be in place to enable volunteers to attain the best, pro-poor outcomes before deployment. Volunteers of all kinds (e.g. local, national, international) need to be supported to develop an emotional and intellectual connection between their actions and the change they bring about in the wider world. This helps people to learn and enhance their capacities as active citizens.

Volunteering as a team effort

We learned the benefit of multidisciplinary teams for tackling complex problems. Change efforts require people who have a range of different specialist technical knowledge, people who hold specialist local knowledge, life experience and particular perspectives (e.g. gender), and facilitators who can sustain momentum and learning. This means that volunteers rarely do effective work on their own. For example, the efforts they help initiate depend on local actors for their effectiveness and sustainability. This reality sits at odds with volunteer support systems that are typically designed around individual placements and disconnected job descriptions. Recruitment processes need to elevate the importance of relational skills in volunteer selection. Volunteers of all kinds (e.g. local, national, international) need to be equipped with the tools to understand how to optimise social networks for change. Individual volunteers are best supported by systems that enable communication and coordination between actors working in the same geographical area or on similar issues. Support systems also need to provide viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate in change efforts. This may mean project money for social activities to nurture unity and a sense of common purpose, as well as accompanying volunteer stipends to enable local actors who want to join the change effort. This is not only about ensuring duty of care to those who have least, but about proactively nurturing local capacities for stewarding social and environmental change.

New ways of thinking about volunteering

Positioning volunteerism as a people's agenda

National development efforts often negatively affect marginalised and excluded groups, particularly when they increase instability of land tenure and access for these groups. Temporary quick fixes offered by the volunteer sector (e.g. feeding programmes, gift-giving, one-off trainings) do not address the drivers of social injustice and poverty. And a 'do no harm' approach is blind to the realities of volunteering, which often distributes risks and benefits unevenly among stakeholders (e.g. volunteers in structured programmes vs local volunteers who join the change effort). The volunteering sector needs to think about the relationship it fosters with government to advance pro-poor development. Making more use of the sector's 'symbolic capital' to legitimise and elevate the concerns of the most marginalised in national debates is likely to help, as well as influencing government institutions so they are more able to respond to citizen-led efforts to tackle poverty. The sector needs to do more to support people in poverty to make sense of volunteering as a resource they can utilise and influence for their own development.

Seeing volunteerism as an opportunity to strengthen governance

Through the work of volunteers, we learned how volunteering programmes can support social mobilisation on the part of communities. But we also learned how these efforts can be undermined by political and organisational systems of governance which lack capacity to respond to citizen-led initiatives. These systems confine people living in poverty to the role of beneficiary and do not provide meaningful routes for them to participate and advocate for their priorities. The way volunteer-involving organisations, and volunteers themselves, engage with local partners and decision-makers is an opportunity to model ways of working that espouse different standards of democratic governance and participation. For example, platforms for youth volunteering can change perceptions among local leaders about the contribution young people can make to development objectives, making the change process more inclusive over time.

Local government and decision-making bodies in particular need support to understand the difference active citizens can make to their change programmes so they are seen as more than ‘warm bodies’ to help with top-down programme implementation. Volunteer-involving organisations need to think about designing a practical tool to analyse governance practice (and not just policy) before making decisions about partners to work with. This will help them identify collaborators who are working to a pro-poor agenda. Volunteer programmes need to incorporate consideration of the support volunteers require when operating in highly political terrains for the benefit of excluded and marginalised communities. In hierarchical social contexts volunteers need to recognise that laying the foundations for collaborative working often means developing individual capacities in combination with collective capacities so successes are not one-person achievements but shared endeavours. The proactive use of participatory development principles and action research approaches applied in this research can help create the space to hear from and encourage local actors whose contribution is usually closed off by power dynamics.

New ways of doing volunteering

Stay and deliver when problems persist

Examination of volunteers’ pathways round life tells us that volunteerism will always come in many forms, from short-term engagements to long-term commitments. Each has its place to instigate and encourage change, but change in highly complex poverty contexts is a slow process. We learned that long-term relationships are not always indicators of dependency, especially when partnerships are used to foster important capacities within marginalised and excluded communities to advocate for their own development. These relationships can either be forged by volunteers or the programmes that manage the movement of volunteers in and out of projects. As a resource for development, volunteering needs to find more consistent and coherent ways of sharing in the risks of experimentation, recognising that people living in poverty can least afford to invest their time in projects that are aiming at (but cannot guarantee) tangible improvements.

Advance volunteer programme design

We learned how volunteers can encourage collaborative working and infuse development processes with much-needed energy. Volunteers often work through relationship building, making them very well suited to working ‘deep’ rather than ‘wide’ with communities. The ‘added value’ of trusting and consistent relationships in change processes could be better articulated to funders. More could also be done to integrate volunteering placements into existing development programmes (e.g. led by government, NGO or private partners) rather than operating as stand-alone ventures. Lastly, more research should be undertaken to understand the unintended impacts of volunteer programme design on communities living in poverty. Linking community insights into strategic discussions about the institutional processes in place to organise funding, recruitment and management of volunteers will help identify constraints and opportunities to improve volunteering as a tool for development that is responsive to the pressing needs of communities.

New approaches to monitoring impact

Typically, M&E work is undertaken to justify and report volunteering impact against programme goals. Or it is not done at all. It is a missed opportunity when volunteering programmes do not capture the richness of change using locally grounded assessments at the community level about what is working and why. We learned how all volunteers and active citizens are a variable in the change process. They are not a constant or uniform resource. Rather they simultaneously affect and are affected by the situation around them. The research shows the importance of re-evaluating the purpose, focus and role of volunteers at regular intervals and from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives. Participatory approaches that support communities and volunteers to think systemically and act experimentally inject an adaptability into volunteering initiatives which helps everyone involved respond to new insights and changing realities. This approach does not have to be arduous or accompanied by formal reporting. Spaces for reflection and conversation can be informal, enjoyable, thought-provoking and empowering, especially when effort is taken to provide feedback and link insights from one stakeholder group to another. This ongoing learning process can build capacities within communities, volunteers, volunteer support staff and partners about how to use volunteering for positive change. We documented the specific techniques we used in the accompanying case study reports.

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9. Appendix

Outputs related to this national report

Accompanying case study reports:

- Aked J (2014) *Valuing Volunteering Philippines – When there are no fish left in the sea. Does environmental awareness translate into positive action?* VSO and Institute of Development Studies.
- Aked J (2014) *Valuing Volunteering Philippines – Riding the waves of change: the challenges of volunteering in highly complex poverty contexts.* VSO and Institute of Development Studies.
- Aked J (2014) *Valuing Volunteering Philippines – Views from the watershed: how citizens and actors describe volunteering for development.* VSO and Institute of Development Studies.
- Aked J (2014) *Valuing Volunteering Philippines – Volunteering for gown and town: learning and change beyond the university's walls.* VSO and Institute of Development Studies.

Additional reports:

- Aked, J (2014) How youth volunteer networks translate into relationships for change: participatory systemic action research to explore interpersonal wellbeing processes in the governance of a watershed in the Philippines. To be presented at ISTR (International Society for Third-Sector Research) 2014 conference in a special session on volunteering and governance, Muenster, Germany.
- Aked, J (2015) Using systemic action research to nurture interpersonal well-being: forming new identities and capacities among volunteers in the Philippines
- Turner, K (2014) *Valuing Volunteering Interim Report.* VSO and Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

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

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Jody's passion is the design of socio-economic contexts that support greater human well-being, social justice and environmental sustainability. She has lived and worked in the UK, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the Philippines, Malaysia and China, alongside fishermen, farmers, factory workers, young people and organisational leaders to understand and influence how change happens.



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