

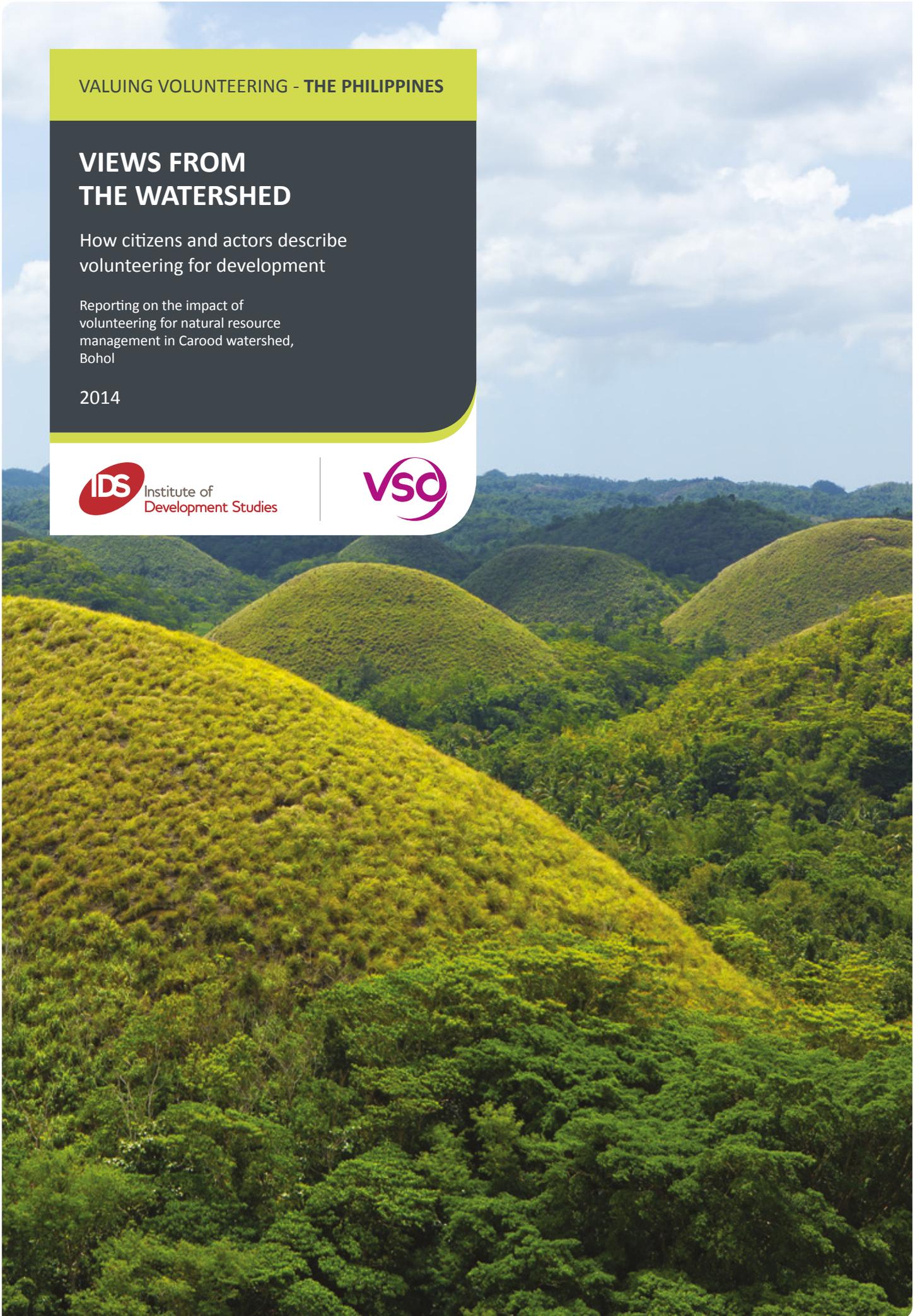
VALUING VOLUNTEERING - THE PHILIPPINES

VIEWS FROM THE WATERSHED

How citizens and actors describe
volunteering for development

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

2014



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IDS

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) is a leading global organisation for international development research, teaching and communications. The *Valuing Volunteering* project is being conducted in partnership with the IDS Participation, Power and Social Change Team.

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Abbreviations

BEMO	Bohol Environment Management Office	LGA	Local Government Academy
BFAR	Bureau for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources	LGU	Local Government Unit
BIR	Bureau of Internal Revenue	LTO	Long-term outcome
BISU	Bohol Island State University	MOA	Memorandum of agreement
BYG	Basdio Youth Group	NAPC	National Anti-Poverty Commission
CBFMA	Community-based Forest Management Agreement	NGO	Non-governmental organisation
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation	PNVSCA	Philippines National Volunteer Sector Coordination Agency
CWMFMC	Carood Watershed Model Forest Management Council	PO	People's Organisation
DENR	Department for Environment and Natural Resources	RHU	Regional Health Unit
DfID	Department for International Development (United Kingdom)	SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
DILG	Department of the Interior and Local Government	STO	Short-term outcome
DOLE	Department of Labour and Employment	SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
DRRM	Disaster Risk Reduction Management	TIN	Tax Identification Number
ICS	International Citizen Service	TWG	Technical Working Group
IDS	Institute of Development Studies	UCYO	Union of Carood Youth Organisation
IEC	Information, Education and Communication	USAID	United States Agency for International Development
IFMN	International Forest Management Network	VPS	Volunteer Placement Supervisor
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	VV	<i>Valuing Volunteering</i>
ISTR	International Society for Third-Sector Research		

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1. Executive Summary

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 (like 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 case study explores the 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, where and when 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

Findings from Carood watershed are organised into eight key themes.

(1) Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work. The integration of poverty and marginalisation issues into environmental 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 in 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. 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.

(2) 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.

(3) 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 of 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.

(4) 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.

(5) 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 like 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 and the motivation of local and outsider volunteers.

(6) 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 which 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.

(7) 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, International Citizen Service (ICS) volunteers 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 leads to greater personal growth and more effective change agents. By contrast, local volunteers are much less likely to have the material or psycho-social 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.

(8) 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 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) were also important opportunities to discuss with individuals in the community how they thought volunteering could be used as a tool for their own development and to improve 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 in acting to improve volunteer programme effectiveness. But to get going we had to focus on building relationships and making research about how change happens relevant to people. Systemic action research requires careful facilitation of a positive learning culture to ensure it provides people with 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

1. Advance 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 the human touch.

2. 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.

3. 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 of 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.

4. 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 if these efforts are persistently undermined by political and organisational systems of governance which 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.

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

There are widespread misconceptions about the role of volunteering in development, which affect 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 effects 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 how, when and in what ways volunteers can be of help to them.

6. 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 for structured programmes and not to local volunteers who join the change effort.

2. Introduction

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. By undermining the natural resource base, we are risking the biophysical inputs (e.g. soil fertility, water retention capacity) into agricultural systems, which provide food security and an income to subsistence and cash crop farmers. Efforts to conserve and manage natural resources are therefore seen as a way of securing the economic base of rural communities.

The health of important ecosystems in the Philippines is also affected by natural disasters and the effects of climate change, making vulnerability criteria an additional barometer that is used to guide development efforts in the Philippines. Composed of over 7,000 islands situated on the Pacific 'Ring of Fire' and in the Pacific typhoon belt, the country has experienced 270 natural disasters over the last two decades, which is more than any other country in the world. These disasters, exacerbated by the effects of climate change, are considered to explain in part the slow progress towards Millennium Development Goals, including on poverty and environment.

Global environmental trends such as environmental degradation and climate change were described by the 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report as collective action problems that create significant challenges for governance. The scale and complexity of these problems require solutions that work for human and ecological systems across geographical space, time and administrative boundaries, while also positively affecting the livelihoods of people living in poverty. To do this effectively, the search for governance systems is considered vital (Carlsson and Sandström, 2008), particularly to identify the social change processes that can initiate and sustain natural resource management. 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.

In the Philippines, volunteering is increasingly recognised as a means to enhance government-led efforts in national development, particularly in agricultural and rural sectors, as specified in the Volunteer Act, 2007. A 2013 survey of all local government units carried out by the Local Government Academy (LGA) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) found demand for volunteers by service area clustered around disaster preparedness and agricultural development.

There was in-country interest for *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* to explore the contribution volunteering makes to Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) aims to: reduce vulnerabilities and exposure, improve adaptation and resilience, and promote conservation and education. In addition we wanted to explore the role volunteerism can play at the intersection between environment, poverty and vulnerability across different geographical zones – e.g. from upland to coastal communities.

In the Philippines it is common for watersheds to be used as the planning and management unit for natural resource management. Watersheds are typically conceptualised on topographical features which comprise terrestrial and marine ecosystems, and which cut across political boundaries. Important features of environmental governance that apply to watersheds include having a multi-actor approach to support a diversity of knowledge, a learning-oriented approach, social networks linking actors and an emphasis on social justice. These factors are thought to contribute to a governance model that is more participatory and inclusive than traditional 'command-and-control' approaches which favour centralised and top-down decision making.

VSO and its in-country federated member VSO Bahaginan has been working through volunteers to support the management of two watersheds in the Philippines: the Ulot watershed in Eastern Samar and the Carood watershed in Bohol, Visayas. This case study is focused on the work of volunteers in Bohol.

Carood watershed

The watershed and its governance structure

A watershed is an area of land connected by water. It has been described by a scientist geographer, John Wesley Powell, as

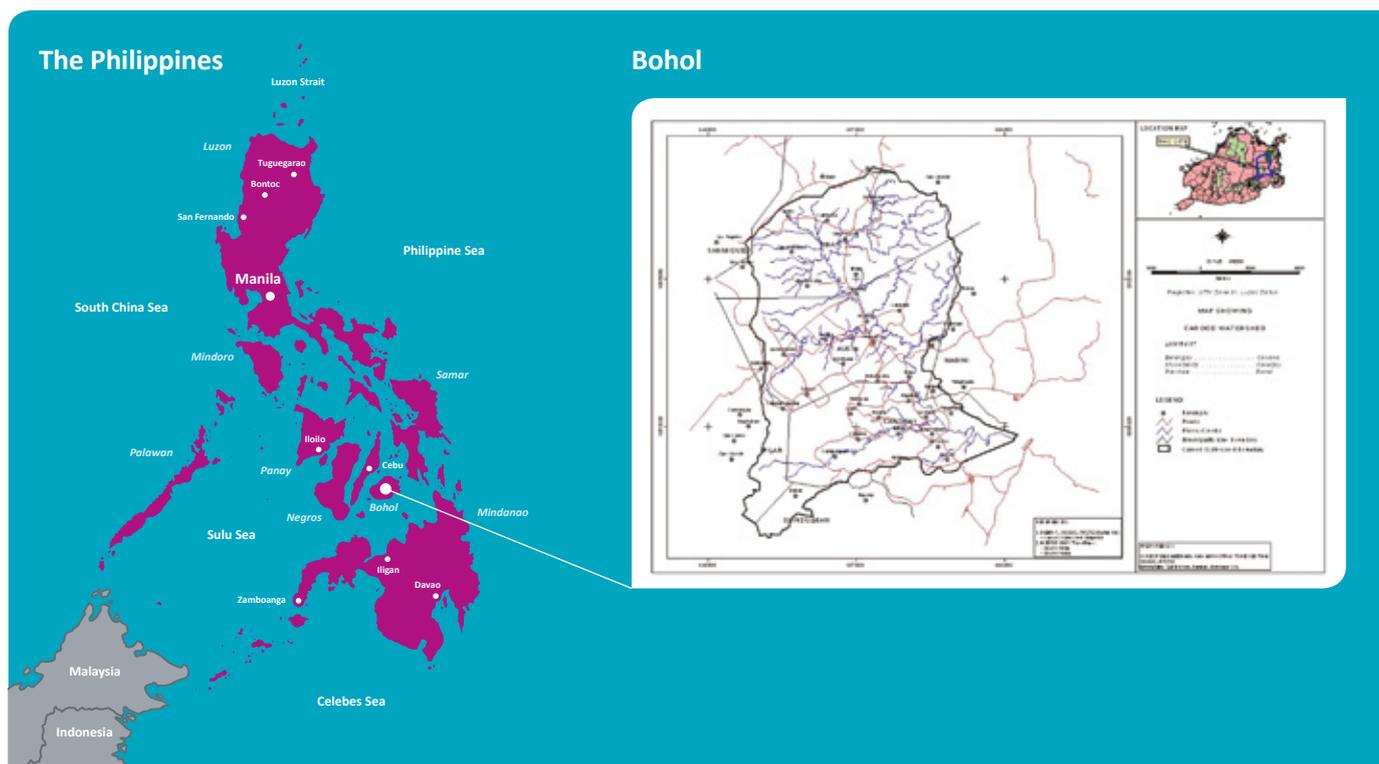
“that area of land, a bounded hydrologic system, within which all living things are inextricably linked by their common water course and where, as humans settled, simple logic demanded that they become part of a community”.

Carood watershed covers 21,714 hectares on the island of Bohol in the Visayas region of the Philippines (see Figure 1). It incorporates parts of six municipalities (Alicia, Candijay, Ubay, Mabini, Pilar and Guindulman) and is home to 64,962 residents. The management of the watershed is informed by a ‘ridge to reef’ approach, incorporating highland, urban and coastal topographies in its management. While some of the municipalities (Pilar, Mabini and Guindulman) have a very small geographical area that falls within the boundary of the watershed, the ecological significance of these localities can still be high. For example, Pilar is at the headland, so these communities can greatly affect water provision through forest cover and solid-waste management.

In Mabini, the implications of a poorly maintained watershed are experienced in the coastal areas, where soil run-off can affect the health of corals and, therefore, marine livelihoods. Other areas like Candijay are prone to flooding. Cutting of mangroves is still commonplace as is quarrying of sand and gravel. In some locations access to water sources is a problem. Climate change predictions for the province estimate a 9.8% increase in seasonal rainfall by 2020, up to 21.2% by 2050. The intensification of rainfall is likely to have local impacts, including exacerbating existing flooding and flood risk. Farmers in San Pascual, Ubay, and upland areas of Guindulman cite changes to rainfall patterns as reasons for crop failure.

The Carood Watershed Model Forest Management Council (CWMFMC) which was formally established by then Governor Erico B. Aumentado in 2003 is a multi-stakeholder body which includes representatives from the six Local Government Units (LGUs), People’s Organisations (POs; e.g. Community-Based Forest Management Areas), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), government agencies and Bohol Island State University. More recently, the Carood watershed was accepted as a member of the International Model Forest Network (IMFN).¹

Figure 1 Case study location – Carood watershed, Bohol, Philippines.



1. IMFN (<http://www.imfn.net/>) is a global community of practice whose members and supporters work toward the common goal of the sustainable management of forest-based landscapes through the Model Forest approach. Three aspects central to a Model Forest are a large landscape, broad partnerships and a commitment to sustainability.

The watershed is not classified as a critical watershed by the government, because it does not meet criteria for having large-scale irrigation systems or hydroelectric companies dependent upon its function. This means that it receives no central government finance to support its sustainable management. Instead it has been the focus of a number of development interventions, social and scientific studies in the last ten years. Whilst some progress has been made, these activities undertaken by local, provincial and regional government agencies, and NGOs, have so far failed to realise a sustainable management system, where the benefits of ecological services are enabled and shared by people. Since 2010, the major resource input supporting operations and activities has been volunteers.

Poverty and the local economy

More than half of households in the watershed live below the poverty line (see Table 1), indicating that a large part of household income goes towards ensuring food security. At the provincial level, 15% of households are 'Poor Hungry' and unable to meet their daily sustenance requirements.

Table 1: Poverty incidence in the six municipalities within Carood watershed (data source: Bohol Provincial Planning and Development Office, 2010)

Municipality	# HH below income threshold	% of total HH
Alicia	2212	62.14
Candijay	1607	67.69
Guindulman	5108	77.42
Mabini	–	–
Pilar	2221	51.4
Ubay	7708	60.52

Each municipality has an urban centre, but many people work and also live in rural settings engaged in plantation forests (including mangroves), agroforestry, rice and vegetable production. Economic activity across the six municipalities is generally limited to small-scale, irrigated and rain-fed agriculture and aquaculture (see summary in Table 2) and livestock. In addition, there is some evidence of agroforestry, particularly among the POs² of the Carood watershed. Despite the natural beauty of the area, there is little in the way of tourism, which is mainly centred round the beach resorts of nearby Anda.

Table 2: Summary of topographical features and livelihood activities by municipality

Municipality	Topographical feature	Livelihood activities
Alicia	Mixed	Rice, corn, root crops, coconut and banana production
Candijay	Gently undulating hills to steep sloped areas	Rice, corn, root crops, coconut and banana production Livestock grazing
Guindulman	Gently undulating hills to steep sloped areas	Rice, corn, root crops, coconut and banana production
Mabini	Lowlands – mainly coastal	Fishing, mud crab harvesting, and some supplementary vegetable and rice cultivation
Pilar	Gently undulating hills to steep sloped areas. With two dams	Rice production, but area within Carood dominated by root crop and agroforestry
Ubay	Lowlands – large urban area and commercial port	Rice and corn production. Livestock farm and carabao centre

On the management council, the POs represent some of the poorest communities in Carood, though levels of wealth do vary considerably within POs. For example, some members live in the town, engaging in other economic activities including running shops, and pay people to farm their plots, while other members live on their farms and are wholly reliant on yields for food and household income.

2. POs are independent associations of citizens with an identifiable leadership, membership and structure. They are often community-based.

Volunteering in the watershed

For VSO Bahaginan, Bohol is not the poorest province in which it works, though it is classified amongst the most vulnerable. Through its partnership with VSO in 2010, the management council has leveraged human resource to address some of the prevailing environmental and social issues in Carood (see Table 3). Local and non-local adult and youth volunteers are active across the Carood watershed, covering a large geographical area. International volunteers have been recruited from countries like the UK and Canada. The national (they are from the Philippines but perhaps not local to Bohol) volunteers involved in the Carood watershed have usually volunteered for VSO before on its international programme. Diaspora volunteers are identified as such as they are typically individuals who have lived outside the Philippines for an extended period or were born outside the Philippines.

Youth volunteers on the UK Government-funded International Citizen Service (ICS) programme comprise international and Filipino volunteers aged 18 to 25. Volunteers coming from outside the watershed all live in the local communities. The ICS programme is a unique form of volunteering in Carood because its volunteers live with host families throughout their placement. They usually live in a different municipality from the one which they are assigned as a work focus. It is the biggest structured volunteer programme in terms of funding and volunteer numbers to have operated in the watershed.

Management of the watershed is also supported by local volunteer activity (see Table 3). Many of the adult local volunteers that the researcher engaged with through *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* are leaders and members of POs but they also extend to motorbike drivers and local government workers who 'chip in' when the need arises or 'go beyond the call of duty' to realise a project.

Of the four POs we have worked most closely with, two are actively engaged in the management and stewardship of designated forestlands in Ubay and Alicia. Community-based Forest Management Agreements (CBFMAs) are awarded to POs and communities for a period of 25 years, renewable for a further 25 years. They cover over 2,000 hectares of land in the Carood watershed. Much of these forestlands (technically called 'timberland') in reality do not have forest cover, and part of the agreement is that at least 20% of the area should be maintained as or restored to forest cover. Both POs have been trying out implementation of agroforestry within the CBFMA framework to reduce the impacts of forest conversion due to shifting agriculture and maintain a livelihood for upland farmers. They both have representation on the Carood council. The other PO linked to the council is a fisher folk association based in Candijay, which works on projects funded by Department for Environment Natural Resources (DENR) and Bureau for Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) to plant mangroves. A fourth PO, based in Candijay, does not have representation on the council but it works with volunteers through its connection with Bohol Island State University (BISU), which is an active member of the Carood watershed management council.

While these POs are all run slightly differently, they do attract funding (e.g. through CBFMA and other government projects) to pay farmers for labour on new initiatives. The POs typically have somewhere between 30 and 60 members, although levels of activity among members vary greatly. The chairpersons, treasurers and dedicated members who keep the organisations going, even when there is no funding or active projects, consider themselves to be volunteers.

Over the course of the ICS programme there has been an increase in the number and activity level of youth organisations in Carood working on environmental issues. The groups are either school-based or geographically situated within local *barangays* (villages). Student volunteers at the university are also engaged through the Cogtong campus's extension programme, working with coastal communities.

Table 3. Volunteer activity in the watershed

Type of volunteer	Volunteer numbers (2010–14)	Volunteers engaging in research (2013–14)	Volunteer work focus	Geographical and organisational focus	Support structures
International long-term volunteers (6–24 months)	5	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and development • Organisational capacity-building • Resource management • Enterprise/livelihoods development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working at level of management council • Some direct engagement with POs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by structured volunteer programme • Funding attached to support volunteers, but not activities • Local partners have made a small budget available for project activities
Youth volunteers – ICS (7 cycles, 3 months each)	Approx 130	36 across cycles 5 and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising and behaviour change • Environmental protection • Capacity building of youth groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working across all 6 municipalities with LGUs, BISU and POs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by structured volunteer programme • Funding attached to support volunteers and some programme activities and host homes
National volunteers (2 months)	3	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational capacity building • Enterprise/livelihoods development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with POs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by structured volunteer programme • Funding attached to support volunteers, but not activities
Diaspora volunteers (3 months)	2	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisational capacity building • Enterprise/livelihoods development • Monitoring and evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with POs, LGUs and management council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported by structured volunteer programme • Funding attached to support volunteers, and some project activities
Local volunteers – adults	Members of 7 POs	4 different POs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental protection • Mobilisation • Assistance in project activities • ‘Pop-up volunteering’ to help out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with PO members and management council 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organised informally • Access to government funded projects, if available
Local volunteers – youth	19 youth groups	3 different youth groups + UCYO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental protection • Mobilisation • Awareness raising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in local communities/villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intermittent support linked to presence of ICS volunteers • No funding attached

Theories of change

There are multiple theories of change influencing decision making about volunteer placements and project activities in the watershed. We consider the Country Strategic Plan and programme goals of VSO Bahaginan, the local strategic framework known as the Carood logic model and VSO's global theory of change for the ICS programme.

VSO Bahaginan's Country Strategic Plan and programme goals

VSO Bahaginan's strategy (2012–15) to use volunteering for lasting change is underpinned by a framework of Asset Reform and Active Citizenship. By Asset Reform they mean "enabling the poor to live with integrity by having control over assets and natural resources" which includes farming and fishing grounds as well as watershed areas for rural families. By Active Citizenship they mean that "the capacity of citizens to perform their duties and to exercise their rights are strengthened, both individually and collectively, to fulfil aspirations for the general wellbeing of community and the larger society". The strategy identifies participation and governance and the facilitation of livelihood and entrepreneurship opportunities as two vital factors (see Figure 2).

For VSO Bahaginan, Active Citizenship means "that the capacity of citizens to perform their duties and to exercise their rights are strengthened, both individually and collectively". They specifically aim to work with young people and other vulnerable groups through volunteering, including working with groups of indigenous peoples in planning and realising their own development. The strategy identifies three main goals related specifically to natural resource management: enhanced resilience of natural systems and improved adaptive capacities of poor and vulnerable communities; an enabled environment for increased participation of poor and vulnerable people in decision making and governance reforms; and improved capacities for duty bearers and claimholders to sustain secured livelihoods and natural resource management.

Figure 2. Programme goals as they relate to natural resource management



A framework of Asset Reform and Active Citizenship – which places poor and marginalised groups at its centre – influenced VSO Bahaginan's decision to place volunteers within Carood watershed.

The Carood watershed logic model

In 2010, CWMFMC identified and defined the focus of long-term management activities in their strategy and log frame (see Appendix). The overall objective is to ensure the conservation and rehabilitation of the watershed to continue to provide the ecosystem services which support livelihoods for the local communities. The programme areas in the log frame are wide-ranging, covering:

- Governance – organisational development; volunteer management system; resource mobilisation
- Knowledge Management and Networking – advocacy; IEC; networking
- Capacity development – capacity needs assessments; cross visits, seminars, tours, web-based learning; mentoring
- Sustainable Resource Use and Management – land use planning; forest protection and conservation; reforestation; mangrove rehabilitation and protection
- Enterprise Development – value chain analysis and preparation of investment portfolio
- Research and Development – identification of research needs/gaps in different ecosystems
- Monitoring and Evaluation – creation of multipartite monitoring team; decision support system.

In early February 2013 there was an annual partnership review between VSO and the management council. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis revealed little progress had been made by volunteers or council members on Monitoring and Evaluation, and Research and Development. Other concerns were voiced about participation and capacity at the grass-roots or community level. Innovative research partnerships and documenting best practice were seen as opportunities. The *Valuing Volunteering* study, with its emphasis on participatory ways of working, was specifically mentioned as an opportunity.

The ICS theory of change

The ICS theory of change is split into two halves at the outcomes stage (see Appendix). One set of outcomes is grouped around volunteer development, with the idea that these outcomes lead to increased active citizenship over the longer term. The *Valuing Volunteering* research is more interested in the group of outcomes for in-country projects. These are to be determined for each specific country during its first year in operation but the version we have been working with listed three main short-term outcomes: changes in resources and awareness in host organisations and communities; changes in attitudes/perceptions towards young people; and infrastructure development. According to the theory, these short-term outcomes lead to two long-term outcomes: behavioural and material changes in host organisations and communities, and communities better able to support their own development. These outcomes contribute to local development goals (e.g. as identified in the Carood log frame), which supports VSO's ultimate objective to see long-term economic, social and environmental development impacts because of investment in the ICS programme.

Focus of this case study

The combination of volunteers working in Carood and access to 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 impacts on poverty.

The inquiry is wide-ranging, spanning a year and incorporating multiple community engagements. 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?

On learning that a lot of volunteer impact was the result of the relationships they forged, we created a separate inquiry to look at the salient features of relationships for change. This is written up as an academic article for presentation at the International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) conference in July 2014, entitled “Civil Society and the Citizen” (see Appendix). The focus of a second related report is an action research inquiry looking to improve relationships for change (see Appendix).

A separate report has been written and translated into Visayan for the management council in Bohol, and participatory sessions have been run with VSO Bahaginan to explore the findings and their implications for programming (see Appendix). The content in this report is aimed at the wider volunteering and natural resource management sectors. Hopefully it can help government agencies and NGOs to better understand the contributions that different volunteers make to initiatives seeking to improve outcomes for people living in poverty through addressing long-standing environmental problems.

3. Methodology

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



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

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

Participatory Systemic Action Research (PSAR) is an action research methodology which embeds reflection, planning, action and evaluation into a single process. The core principle behind action research is that we learn as much if not more from action than from analysis. It incorporates iterative cycles of action and analysis, allowing us to reflect at intervals on a particular action or approach and adapting it according to what we've learnt. The action research used by Valuing Volunteering was participatory because it was led by individuals directly affected by or involved in volunteering for development initiatives, and they defined the action research process and questions. It was systemic because we assessed the impact of these actions by considering the knock-on effects for the actors, actions and contexts comprising the wider social system. SAR typically takes place over a period of 18 months to three years.

Research in Bohol

Valuing Volunteering Philippines ran three separate but interlinked inquiries in Bohol over eight visits lasting anything between three days and one month between February 2013 and February 2014 (see Figure 3). Insights from the generic inquiry form the basis of this case study. The relational inquiry and action research form the basis of other case studies.

Most of the work carried out for the generic inquiry took place in Bohol between April and May. But follow-up activities also took place in August, September and January. The boundary between the generic inquiry and the relational inquiry was often blurred as interviews and group sessions exploring volunteer relationships revealed more generic insights relevant to this case study.

Work in Bohol was linked into other organisational, national and global learning forums. These sessions helped make sense of the data and its implications.

Figure 3. Case study components and methods across time

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



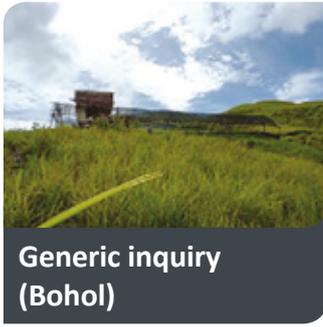
February 2013



March 2013



- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



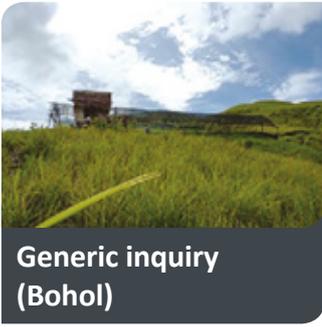
April 2013

<p>2.5-week stay with a family in San Pascual</p>	<p>6 ICS vol interviews: Story collection; social network mapping; wellbeing qualities</p>	<p>First workshop with Basdio Youth Group (BYG):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paint me a Picture about ICS volunteers • Reflection on effectiveness 	<p>Testing model of wellbeing with psychology department, UP Diliman</p>
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May 2013

<p>Generic interviews to understand how volunteering is experienced locally: POs; VPSs in LGUs; Eskaya tribe</p>	<p>Group session: Collecting ICS volunteer stories and mapping to log frame</p>	<p>Related interviews with local government officials</p>	<p>Reviewing SNM and storytelling techniques</p>
<p>Interviews to explore volunteer interactions: VSO long-term volunteer; local youth group; PO chairperson</p>	<p>Group session: ICS volunteers review changes in personal and group social networks</p>	<p>Second workshop with BYG: Introducing concept of wellbeing</p>	<p>Feedback to ICS team at VSO UK</p>
<p>Ethnographic insights into community life and ICS volunteer experience</p>	<p>Collecting 10+ community stories of volunteer action</p>	<p>Batch 5 ICS volunteers leave (May 12)</p>	<p>Summary report to CWMFMC</p>
<p>Data on local definitions and characteristics of volunteering</p>	<p>Participation in ICS debrief sessions on achievements</p>	<p>Relationship building</p>	<p>Group social network map shared with VPSs</p>
<p>Insights into wellbeing qualities that matter</p>	<p>25+ stories of change related to vol action</p>	<p>Knowledge about the youth group and local environmental priorities</p>	<p>Evidence base on structure and development of volunteer networks for NRM</p>
<p>Group validation of importance of relationships</p>	<p>15 personal before and after social network maps + 1 group map</p>	<p>Data on relationship with ICS volunteers</p>	<p>Emergent patterns about how social interactions are experienced</p>
<p>Identification of relational barriers to change</p>	<p>BYG interest in social relationships to improve effectiveness</p>	<p>Data on distribution of wellbeing between groups</p>	

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



**Generic inquiry
(Bohol)**



**Relational inquiry
(Bohol)**



**Action research
Inquiry (Bohol)**



**Linking insights
(Beyond Bohol)**

June 2013

ICS batch 6 volunteers arrive (beg June)

Review of VV reports – for insights on relationships

July 2013

IDS write shop:
Discussions and writing exercises on role of relationships

Participatory session:
exploring youth volunteering and relationships

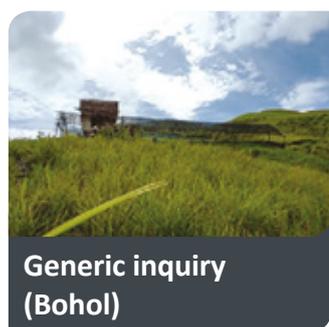
Analysis, self-reflection and planning

Cross-reference of insights across cultures and contexts

Validation of links between relationships and AC and sustainability

Decision about methods and focus of inquiry around youth volunteering

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



Generic inquiry (Bohol)



Relational inquiry (Bohol)



Action research Inquiry (Bohol)

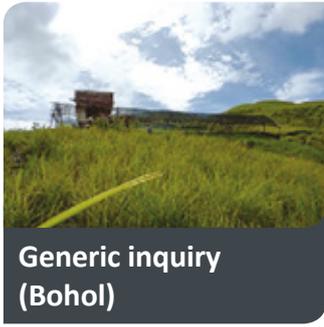


Linking insights (Beyond Bohol)

August 2013



- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



Generic inquiry (Bohol)



Relational inquiry (Bohol)



Action research Inquiry (Bohol)

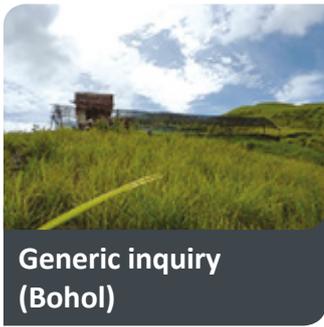


Linking insights (Beyond Bohol)

September 2013

<p>Chika chika catch up with PO</p> <p>Interview with national volunteer</p>	<p>Validation of volunteer data Visit to Pilar LGU to understand relationships from perspective of people working with volunteers – LGU assistant supervisor, nurse and community</p> <p>Validation of volunteer data Social network mapping with the leader of a youth group</p> <p>Validation of volunteer data Participatory session with <i>barangay</i> in Pilar</p> <p>Validation of volunteer data Follow-up interview with Pilar LGU</p> <p>Validation of volunteer data Interview with RHU, Pilar</p>	<p>Actions by me: writing up menu of ideas for ICS volunteers</p> <p>Coronation event led by BYG: Jody is judge. Event is amazing and raises money</p> <p>Meeting with Leader of BYG: reviewed menu and their upcoming plans and how to prepare ahead of new volunteers arriving</p>	<p>Seeding Sharing data with wider ICS programme and local staff in email update</p>
	<p>Learning about how different approaches to using volunteers affect the relational experience</p>	<p>Continued learning about relationships for change</p> <p>Observations and reflections on changes to how leader feels about making links to new ICS volunteers</p>	

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



October 2013

ICS batch 7 volunteers arrive (Oct 1)

Earthquake (15 Oct)

Data analysis session with VSO Bahaginan staff and VV global team

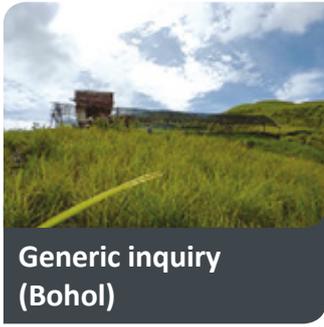
National stakeholder meeting to discuss research findings

Data analysis session with VSO Bahaginan board members

Emerging questions and implications for volunteering organisations

Application of global findings to Philippines context

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



November 2013

Typhoon Haiyan (8 Nov)

Validation of volunteer data with staff of BISU and seaweed farmers

Sixth workshop with BYG: Reviewed interactions with ICS volunteers with members

Validation of volunteer data with staff of Alicia school

Validation of volunteer data with young people and RHU in Pilar

Validation of volunteer data with youth groups in Ubay

December 2013

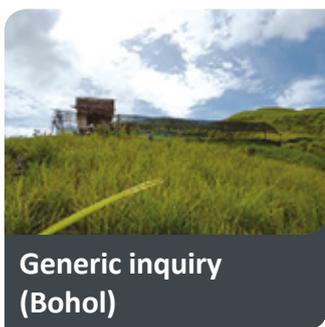
ICS batch 7 volunteers leave placement early

Community story collection following coastal clean-up

Learning about how volunteer interactions are experienced by different local actors

Continued learning about relationships for change

- Component
- Activities
- Outcomes



**Generic inquiry
(Bohol)**



**Relational inquiry
(Bohol)**



**Action research
Inquiry (Bohol)**



**Linking insights
(Beyond Bohol)**

January 2014

<p>Email exchange with diaspora volunteer</p>	<p>Validation of volunteer data Second visit to seaweed farmers and catch up with PO (mangrove planting)</p>	<p>Seventh workshop with BYG: action planning, financial accounting and visit to new <i>barangay</i> captain</p>	<p>Informing ICS sector analysis with staff at VSO head office</p>
<p>Interview and social network mapping with long-term volunteer</p>	<p>Validation of volunteer data with students of Alicia school</p>	<p>Data analysis and prototyping with UCYO</p>	
	<p>Social network mapping as a research team</p>		

February 2014

<p>Learning about volunteer experiences</p>	<p>Internal reflection about our own relationships</p>	<p>Money pledged by <i>barangay</i> to support BYG activities</p>	<p>Inclusion of findings in a sector-wide briefing for ICS</p>
	<p>Learning about how volunteer interactions are experienced by different local actors</p>	<p>Application of research findings into a prototype</p>	

4. Findings

This section pulls together the findings to answer the central *Valuing Volunteering* research question of ‘How, where and when does volunteering affect poverty?’, and the starting questions of interest for this case study:

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?

Together, the insights make up a citizen’s view of the ways volunteering has contributed to change for communities in the watershed. This is used to reflect on programmatic and organisational theories of change. Grounded in the realities of people’s experiences, the findings point to some areas of improvement to enhance volunteering as a tool for change.

Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work



The reason VSO Bahaginan makes investments of volunteer time on its participation & governance and livelihood programmes is to “bring people together to fight poverty and disadvantage”. As a benchmark for effectiveness, this means that volunteering in Carood needs to lead to demonstrable impact for the watershed’s poorest and most marginalised residents.

The integration of poverty and marginalisation issues into environmental 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, or 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 or 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 from outside the watershed can play an important role 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. 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.

Accessing the poorest and most marginalised

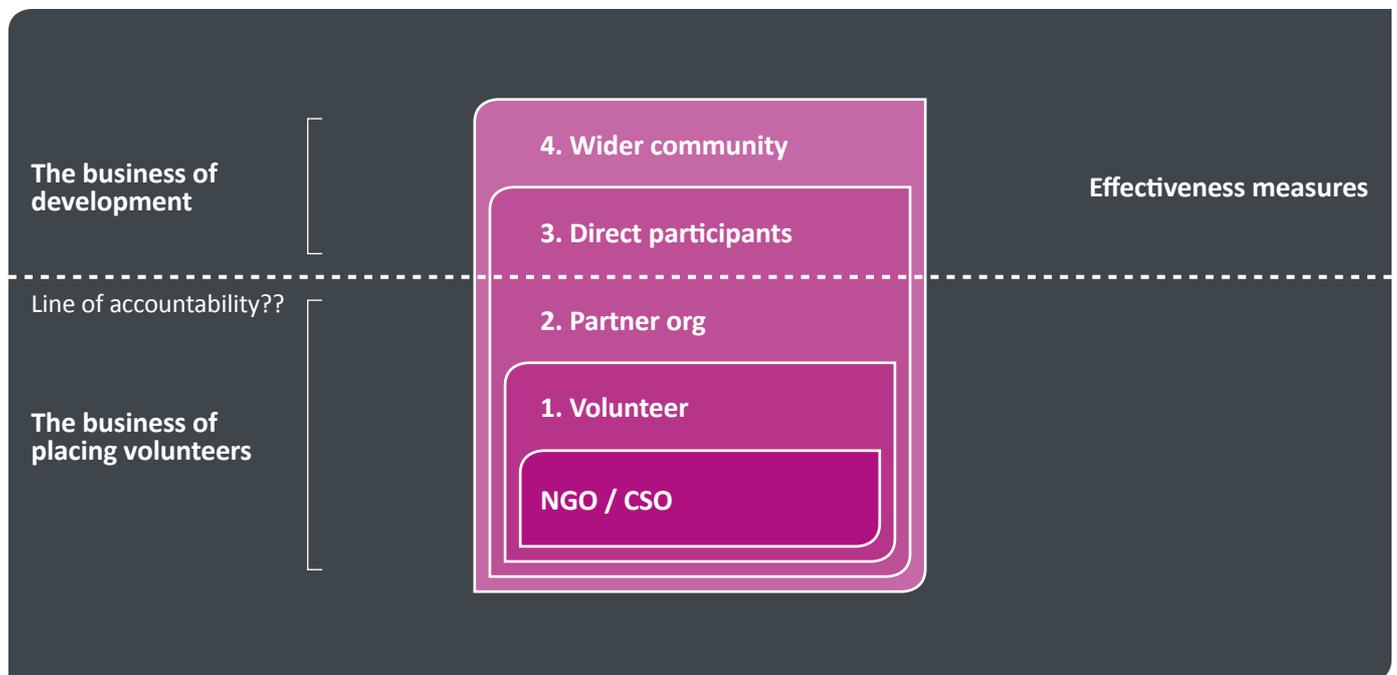
VSO describes itself as a development organisation working through volunteers. This means its contribution to development is determined by the experiences of people living in poverty. In much the same way as the wider development sector, it must contend with the challenge of aligning the resources it has access to (e.g. a pool of volunteers, finance) to what a community says it needs. This manifests itself as a practical dilemma about how to marry the day-to-day mechanics of enabling, managing and advocating for volunteering with a responsiveness that enables the direction of development to be informed by actors at the community level. Figure 4 attempts to illustrate an important question. Where should the line of accountability for development organisations working through volunteers be? Should it stop at identifying a good partner and matching its pool of volunteers to the human resource needs identified in programme strategies? Or should its decisions about how to allocate volunteering resources be directed by grounded insights from community actors (e.g. direct participants and the wider community) about what needs to change and why?

When the balance of stakeholders informing the direction of development is limited to the NGO, its volunteers and the partner organisation, a development organisation can find itself disconnected from the realities of poverty. This was captured in a reflection by one volunteer working in Carood watershed about the way VSO works: “I sometimes wonder... is VSO in the business of placing volunteers or in the business of development?”

We took this insight into a session with VSO Bahaginan staff to try and understand how volunteering programmes ensure they stay connected and accountable to those living in poverty. They identified two processes in place to help achieve relevance and responsiveness in the allocation of resources. In the Philippines, development initiatives working through volunteers are encouraged to go to some lengths to ensure placement of volunteers takes place in some of the poorest municipalities. This is encouraged by the Philippines National Volunteer Sector Coordination Agency (PNVSCA) which has data on high-priority areas. Another tactic that VSO Bahaginan uses is to work with partners who have a local strategic framework for change, such as the Carood watershed logic model. The idea is that the local strategic framework can be relied upon because it is informed by local priorities. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* explored both these strategies in Bohol and found that neither condition is sufficient to ensure volunteers actually work with people living in poverty.

On paper, the structure of the management council looks as though it will provide volunteers and their work with ready access to the views and realities of people in poverty. The seven members from POs represent farmers and fishermen, who account for some of the poorest groups in the Philippines. We checked out how accountable the POs are to those in poverty by running a participatory theatre session with members of one of them. They were asked to tell a story through drama about a time when a person or organisation tried to change something in their community. See Story 1 for one of the stories the group acted describing the process the community went through to arrive at an improvement in livelihood outcomes, through the establishment of their PO.

Figure 4. Extending accountability of volunteer efforts to the people living in poverty



After the show, an actor summarised the story as being about moving to the People's Organisation. They described the story as having a happy ending because "we were lost and then we found the legal organisation who will listen and understand us ... They asked for time, not money". Another audience member explained "I realised I am not on the mountain [the area where they farm] to give money. I am here to farm ... So, instead of giving money I decided I will save it and buy a farm". When asked if she had achieved this yet, she said not yet but she is sending one of her daughters to school now. Another mentioned she has been able to buy a motorbike.

The PO had improved the situation of many of its members, indicating that they could be good partners for work on poverty issues. But how much engagement do volunteers have with PO members during their placements?

In most cases, volunteers are placed to work with the management council body or within agricultural units of the local government units. In large part, this means that day-to-day they are working at the organisational level, not at the grass-roots community level. The exception was the PO mentioned above which used to receive youth volunteers under a previous programme called Global Xchange.

"We received very good volunteers. X finished studies in environmental engineering. X knew how to make communication and trained me and left guidance on note taking and how to do meetings".

Community volunteer/PO member

In many ways this programme was the precursor to the International Citizen Service (ICS), placing youth volunteers for three months. But practically it was organised slightly differently and this affected the experience of the PO. With Global Xchange, the volunteers lived close by the PO's community-based management area. They were much more embedded in day-to-day farming activities and had much more contact with members of the PO living and working within the site. For example, their proximity meant they could get up early with the farmers –

"At 6 am they are there, so all activities they are part of".

Local adult volunteer/PO member

When the ICS programme was introduced, the volunteers lived in a different municipality and were reliant on long journeys (sometimes two hours plus) to arrive at work. The ICS volunteers also had a lot more non-placement commitments such as weekly ICS team meetings, organising Community Action Days and Global Citizenship Days.

"The 'internal processes' do seem to have intensified ... they are not around that day, that day, that day".

Volunteer

"They [the volunteers] changed their schedule ... Before they are living with the community and they can meet every day people in the community and they can talk. Now it is different. They live in another host home ... very far."

Local adult volunteer/PO member

Story 1: Story of change for members of a PO represented on the Carood watershed management council.

"The farmers"

Scene 1: Before the change

The scene opens with one character calling residents of the community to a meeting about their organisation. The convener invites them to sit down. She explains that she needs to collect money from each of the houses of the community to help with other members' livelihoods. The two women explain that they cannot afford to give anything. The man stands in the background, as an indication of his discomfort with the idea. The convener of the meeting asks how it is possible that people have not got enough to give. She says she is the one handling the organisation but that there is a "higher level". She informs them if they don't want to do this right now, they will have to come back. This is intended to be a threat.

Scene 2: During the change

The scene opens with the same meeting set up. One of the attendees introduces themselves by asking if the higher leader would consider that they do not sign the agreement. The convener says this is not possible because the higher leader said we cannot change the plan. Their payment is part of the plan.

The attendees attempt to assert themselves with the suggestion that they will not pay but rather transfer to another organisation. The convener responds by saying the higher leader says they are forced to do it. This prompts an emotional reaction from one of the women, who cries because she cannot afford the fee, saying that "the money is too big".

Scene 3: After the change

This scene opens at a different meeting. The community members are the same, but the conveners of the meeting are different. The community members listen to the proposition of a different organisation. This one is asking for registration because they have some projects from the government. This comes with a budget to pay them for work if they work to help develop the projects. They are not asking for money, just time. The residents decide to stay with them.

They were working with youth volunteer groups in nearby schools, but not the out-of-school youth who were children of the PO members. The time contributed by PO officers to support the youth volunteers didn't translate into enough gains for members to make it worthwhile for them to continue. Despite being under pressure to do so, the Chairperson decided not to be a focal point for youth volunteers in the future. They requested volunteers with specific knowledge, such as on organisational development, livelihoods and environmental management. Eventually VSO Bahaginan were able to respond with the national and diaspora volunteering programmes but it took some time to secure funding and volunteers in placement.

Practical challenges

As well as the barriers created by programme design, language limitations can also affect how much volunteers interact and engage with POs and their members. International and national volunteers do not usually speak the local language (Visayan), and the farmers and fishermen do not usually have a good enough grasp of English or Tagalog to make communication easy. The volunteers do not have an accompanying project activity budget to pay translators. This limitation was intended to be addressed by the deployment of national and diaspora volunteers. But the national volunteer also experienced difficulties working across the seven POs during his two-month placement, though for different reasons. None of the POs are close to each other and some are in quite remote spots that require a hike or a motorbike to access.

“My budget is 2,500 pesos/month and I have to go to the POs and I have to take a habal habal [motorbike]. After 2–3 visits you are financially drained so I limit myself.”

Volunteer

The various volunteer platforms have faced difficulties when it comes to enabling volunteers to access members of POs regularly in their work. Even though they are working in the same geographical area, barriers to establishing contact and maintaining relationships persist. This detachment from some of the poorest and most affected members of the watershed became a particularly important issue on realising that the priorities of POs are not always aligned to the activities of volunteers or the management council (find more on this in the sections “When volunteers work at cross-purposes” and “How the governance system of local partners influences volunteering”). On sharing this insight with VSO Bahaginan, one staff member reiterated that the volunteers are working across two levels – at the council and with people living in poverty – and the priorities among these two different groups can be very different. Another staff member added,

“We should be considering and taking stock on a People’s Agenda in our processes.”

VSO Bahaginan staff member

The research did find good examples of members of the management council and some volunteers channelling their efforts towards helping marginalised groups (see below), demonstrating that it is possible to work consciously with the interests of people typically excluded in the formal governance or management processes. But where this was happening, it was not consistent practice across volunteering in the Carood watershed.

Working ‘wide’ vs ‘deep’

The area covered by volunteers in Carood watershed is geographically large, which may limit the impact that is being had on entrenched or complex problems for the most marginalised groups. A review of the POs carried out by a national volunteer found all the organisations to be in a ‘growing’ stage, despite being established for 10 years in some cases. To reach the next level, ‘autonomy’, a number of interventions were identified that would strengthen organisational development, from financial management to human resources, production and marketing. Some data suggests volunteers may be in more of a position to respond to circumstances if they can provide a regular and/or sustained commitment to people living in poverty.

This was certainly the feeling some of the volunteers had. The national volunteer regretted the difficulty he had experienced accessing all the POs (see above), reporting that it would have been better to have had more regular access. While the diaspora volunteer did manage to work across seven POs, efforts were focused on one. To navigate the geographical distances delineated by the ecological boundaries of the watershed, the ICS volunteers spend a lot of time on public transport between municipalities. The shortcoming of this reality was experienced by the community as well. For example, it was reported that ICS volunteers are only in each school for a short period of time. They touch on one level or one section and then they go to a different school.

“Can the volunteers spread through the school? They cannot focus. They lecture with children in one school on one day and after they transfer”.

Community member and local adult volunteer

It was difficult to understand how decisions were being made about the number of schools that POs or community volunteers were expected to engage with during a placement. For example, are 19 semi-active youth groups better than 8 fully engaged organisations? There was some indication in the reporting systems of the ICS programme that the number of interactions with people living in poverty mattered more than the quality of the interaction. The programme was only allowed to count new participants in events, trainings, seminars and workshops, so repeat activities with the same group of people did not have the same reporting weight. The measurement and evaluation tool was creating an incentive to bring new people in, and a disincentive to work long-term, encouraging volunteers to work ‘wide’ vs ‘deep’.

Interestingly, this ethos goes against VSO Bahaginan’s objective to support people in poverty towards asset reform and active citizenship, which are neither short-term outcomes nor unambitious programme aims. They involve a lot of capacity building, which takes time. There was general agreement among VSO Bahaginan staff that log frames and their accompanying measurement and evaluation tools do a poor job of representing the lives and experiences of the people involved.

“We are boxed into the tool but have no way of excusing ourselves to work in a more flexible way.”

VSO Bahaginan Board Member

Yet these tools are often heavily influenced by donor requirements. In their volunteer work with people with disabilities on a different island of the Philippines, the team have taken a different approach to capture learning, that evaluation based on numbers of hours, activities and attendance has missed.

In the context of natural resource management, it is worth noting that the watershed has been constructed on ecological grounds. This research suggests the same scale is not necessarily supportive of efforts to improve management of natural resources at the human scale. For the accompanying social changes to take hold, volunteer efforts to improve environmental outcomes may need to be more focused and less dispersed or be incorporated into a system that cascades learning across local partners and actors.

Benefiting the poorest and most marginalised

Where volunteers have managed to work with poor and marginalised groups, did their lives improve as a result? *Valuing Volunteering* research provided the opportunity to answer this question from the perspective of people living in poverty.

Helping out with a community initiative

We found examples of staff in local government units making strategic use of volunteers to try and bring about change. This process is about matching the strengths of the volunteers to the needs of the LGU and communities. Likened to “celebrities”, the ICS volunteers attract attention and intrigue wherever they go. This can be an uncomfortable reality of the volunteering model. Volunteers coming from outside remote provinces will be perceived as having some sort of special status. This is especially the case in locations where people do not typically travel beyond the village or local town. The research identified instances where this ‘special status’ had been used as a catalyst for community change.

For example, in Pilar, local government officials noticed how this ‘outsider’ effect makes volunteers a good vehicle for delivering environmental messages (see Story X). The presence of volunteers is used to encourage local action on community issues that extend beyond the household,

“At the community level, people are contented with how things are going, especially here. They do not have to think about things and improve their way of life. They focus on the household and putting their child in college. They are contented with how the community is. It is not their priority to look at the wider community ... Even those who are not below the poverty line think that way. It is not about the money. I think it is our mentality, of Filipinos in general. It comes from the inductive way of thinking. We are taught the family is the basic unit of society so if we improve the household, the community benefits. This is how most of us are thinking so we think less about the bigger picture.”

Local government official/Assistant VPS

We visited Barangay Cansungay situated far from the LGU office, where volunteers had been working with the Regional Health Unit (RHU) to support activities on environmental sanitation for healthy living. This was an initiative that was already underway on the part of the LGU and the local barangay and connected to a national search for best sanitation practices. So, what extra value did volunteers bring to the effort?

Story 2: Integrating youth volunteering into local government priorities

The work of the ICS volunteers in Pilar is contributing to local plans to reverse the practice of local government collecting garbage. Turning this practice on its head, the LGU wants to provide incentives to recycle at the household level instead. They have identified school students as a key cohort to target in this effort.

The ICS youth volunteers help because they come from another place. They have what staff at the LGU describe as a biblical effect because people tend to listen more to ‘outsiders’. The extra work of LGU staff to support the youth volunteers complements, rather than distracts from, priorities. As the VPS explains,

“It is our idea. Our concept. Our programme. But they talk for us to our constituents.”

VPS, LGU

The LGU is also looking for ways to sustain the environmental messaging. For example, it is asking teachers to make pillow making from recycled materials part of students’ grades, recognising that “the older ones sometimes follow what the children do, especially if it is required at school”.

Within Pilar, government officials are reporting that they are beginning to see changes in behaviour at the local level. Less garbage is being burned in some barangays. And young people are beginning to change their attitudes. When asked whether this is the majority of young people already, the VPS honestly reflects,

“There are only few but it important that it starts already. If someone starts it will multiply. What is hard is to start.”

The spirit inherent in volunteering also affects the outlook of local young people,

“They realise youth from other places come to help us, so why don’t we help ourselves?”

VPS, LGU

The moment you arrive in the village you know it. All the fences are painted, the roads are flower-lined and there is not a piece of trash in sight. It really is beautiful. We were invited into the Barangay Hall, a lovely building with lots of pictures, photographs, plans and details of local population numbers. The village is home to 182 households and on average each household has 6–11 members. Photos of ICS volunteers planting trees were on display at the entrance. We learned that *barangay* officials had introduced an ordinance around environmental sanitation but implementation had not been achieved. Local officials explained this was because people had not been informed. The presence of the volunteers – and the activities they took part in, like tree planting, signing for waste segregation, conducting Information, Education and Communication (IEC) sessions and surveying the *barangay* for solid-waste management (see Figure 5), helped to raise awareness about the ordinance and the national competition for the greenest and healthiest *barangay*.

Photo set 1: Photos of Barangay Cansungay



We asked whether it mattered if it was the ICS volunteers or the local officials running these activities,

“The project would have still been realised. We invite volunteers for people to have a drive. The purpose.”
“We are happy the volunteers were able to help out. It starts from small but seeing people responding very well. The flowers are blooming. It is a wow factor.”
 Local community officials

We asked if the volunteers were successful in encouraging people.

“Of course. They did ... Before the people complained, why did the Barangay accept the search for Best Barangay. It is a lot of work. A lot of responsibilities. Now they appreciate it ... With bayanihan [Filipino expression for community help] it is us, it is our own ... there is more potential having foreign volunteers than just the bayanihan. They have travelled so far.”

The officials viewed the volunteers as one of the “support systems” of the *barangay* and they tapped the volunteers for information also.

“We also wanted to know about climate change. We asked the volunteers about this and we were given information about flooding.”

We visited a school that had worked with ICS volunteers on the IEC, approximately three months after the sessions. Five girls and five boys aged 8–10 years painted us pictures of what had happened with the volunteers, what they had learned about Carood watershed and how they felt (see Photo set 2). They reported painting with the volunteers, playing basketball, planting and watering flowers. They said that the *barangay* had changed,

“It was ugly before, now it is beautiful”.
 Student

Figure 5. Stakeholder map showing who was involved and what they contributed to the change effort

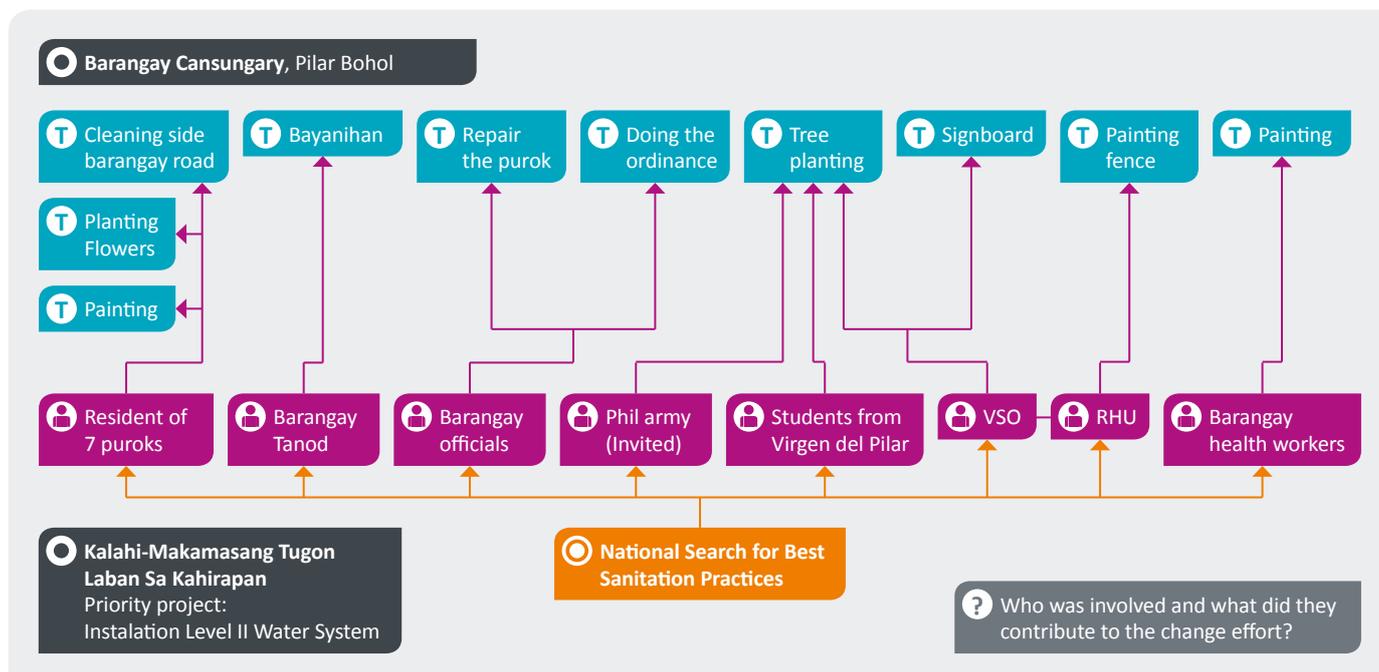


Photo set 2: Students painting us a picture of their experience with ICS volunteers



Knowledge on Carood watershed was not so strong. They did express that

“Carood watershed is the one that helps out Cansungay ... not just for the community but the rest of the townspeople.”

Student

One student recalled the volunteer teaching her how to throw the garbage in the correct trash can. Some felt they could share with friends some of the things they had learned but some “felt awkward sharing the whole thing to their friends”.

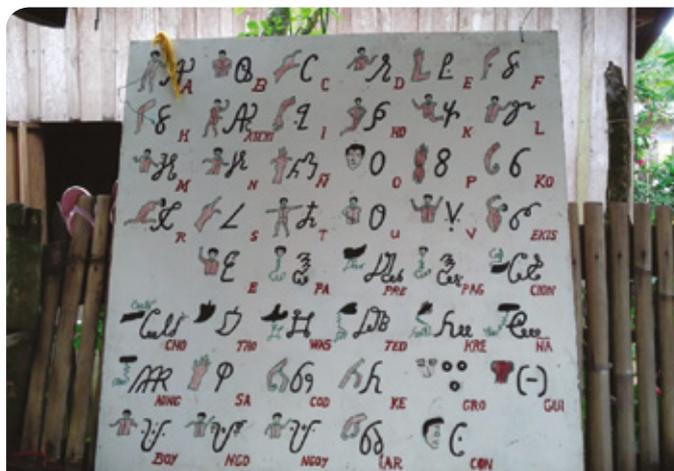
They thoroughly enjoyed interacting with the volunteers. They were happy and excited. Sometimes this was because they felt good about what they were doing (e.g. the painting) and sometimes it was because of the time they shared with people different to them. They remembered very specific things about how the volunteers sat in the shade because they were hot, or their own fascination about how the volunteers did “the whole drinking thing”, referring to the way a Filipino volunteer from Manila drank water from a bottle.

In summary, while the volunteers were only one part of a much bigger change effort in Barangay Cansungay, involving different actors and a range of different activities – from local policy making to fundraising on the part of the Regional Health Unit for materials – their contribution was perceived as valuable as a way of uniting people around a common cause. It seemed to be a combination of an ‘outsider effect’, the volunteering spirit and different knowledge sets (e.g. on climate change) which explains how the volunteers were useful to the community.

Engaging the Eskaya tribe

In other cases, volunteer efforts to benefit marginalised groups had mixed success. Efforts by ICS volunteers in cycle 5 (fifth cycle of volunteers be based in Bohol) to include the Eskaya, an indigenous population living high up in Pilar, within the Carood watershed, did not result in positive change for the community. This community is represented on the Carood management council but they have difficulty attending meetings because of the distance and the quality of their road, which is impassable in heavy rain. This means they are excluded from decision-making processes.

A reflection session of Eskayan leaders with *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* revealed that the community perceived their visit to be about learning about local culture and teaching the children through workshops and making pillow cases with recycled materials. They liked the volunteers and enjoyed having visitors, but their biggest problems did not change: building a road, having a school and having an Eskayan training centre. When the next cycle of volunteers organised a visit two to three months later to celebrate the UN’s Indigenous Peoples Day, they were challenged by local leaders about how they could help them and the lack of follow-up from previous visits. As the volunteer who organised the event explained,



“We went to try and have a cultural sharing. The focus was supposed to be cultural sustainability and how the Eskaya cope with this ... We had the event and took the whole team there. We got a talk and saw the [Eskayan] script and the volunteers each brought a dish and they provided a dish and we shared food.

“In the afternoon we shared the British culture and they asked ‘What are the volunteers doing for us? What are VSO doing for us? What is the LGU doing for us?’ It was difficult for us to answer these questions as youth volunteers. There is a four-layer language barrier: English – Tagalog – Visayan – Eskaya. I think they wanted to have their say. It was challenging on the day but a positive thing because it showed us how they felt. We agreed to go back and give them a report and arrange a meeting with the LGU and the Eskayan people”.

British ICS volunteer

Valuing Volunteering Philippines did discuss the potential for a more consistent engagement with the Eskaya, but local VSO staff cited the difficulty in accessing the community. It takes about two hours to reach the community from the local LGU and over bad road. It is difficult to have youth volunteers based there because it is a remote location with little access to health or emergency services. There is also an issue about whether the youth volunteers are limited by their own capacity in how they can help with some of the more entrenched problems faced by the community, such as building an access road. In these circumstances, is it better for volunteers to continue to engage in whatever way they can, or withdraw altogether?

In September 2013, the LGU was considering how to respond to some of the comments made by the Eskaya.

“They [the ICS volunteers] wrote reports and we gave them to the Eskaya. We discussed how the Eskaya would like the volunteers to help making educational modules to teach their dialect to children. But the teacher who initiated told me they are having problems with the NCIP [the National IP organisation] as they are asking why they are only doing this with the Eskaya here and not in Guindulman for example. This is not my place to tell the Eskaya this so we are thinking that for the next cycle we will focus on organising youth groups with the Eskaya members to ensure there is youth representation to UCYO [Union of Carood Youth Organisations].”

Local government official/Assistant VPS

Dialogue with the community about their needs and the constraints of the volunteers seems to be an important stage in deciding how the Eskaya and volunteers in Carood might work together in the future. What is striking is that this level of engagement had not taken place before volunteers visited. If the capacity-building work is not undertaken with communities to anticipate how volunteers may or may not be able to help them, then it is difficult for them to make informed choices about whether time spent with volunteers is going to be useful.

Organising seaweed farmers

At Bohol Island State University (BISU), ICS volunteers worked on an extension project with seaweed farmers in Panas, but their impact was affected by wider systemic forces. Through a survey they identified economic discrepancies in how much farmers could sell their produce to middlemen. Those who lived further from the town got less money for their seaweed. This finding formed the basis of a university extension project to support the seaweed farmers to organise (see Story 3) into one group with more power to secure a better price at point of sale.

The work of the volunteers was good quality. The survey and data analysis that they carried out allowed the university department to present their findings on a poster at an academic conference. But the degree of change at the community level was limited for a combination of reasons. The storyteller (see Story 3) felt the work had benefited “nobody”. When we asked the storyteller what would have made a difference in his story, his answer was “personal relationships”. It was difficult to get to the bottom of the politics, but the local elections had seen a new Mayor take office and this is when things began to change, making it difficult for work to continue in Panas to support community members to register their organisation with the Department of Labor and Employment.

Story 3: Panas seaweed farmers: an experience with ICS volunteers

“I was a VPS [Volunteer Placement Supervisor] and I am also the Director of Research, Development and Extension. My job is to find opportunity for my office to extend services to the community. I did some getting information from the fisherfolk about any technical assistance they may need. Not funds as we don’t have any. I found out most fisherfolk in Panas are also seaweed farmers. Seaweed cultivation became their basic income because of the lesser catch from fishing so it came to mind to do more work with seaweed farmers to shift them away from fishing. So according to the community it is an easy income. So here come the volunteers and I ask them how can you help me start an extension project. They were eager to work on that. We started with a survey to get information from majority of seaweed farmers. So over a few days they wrote a questionnaire. They consulted me about if it will contain all the information. They went there and out of 100 we interviewed 63 planters. They interviewed them. I was really not with them. Out of 63 on the question about whether organising is best for them 60 said yes because according to them if they are organised they have a personality, a set of officers, and government organisations will only give assistance to organised groups and not individual beneficiaries. I sent them back to say we will have a meeting so they can present the findings to be validated by farmers and Barangay officials. We had 100 in attendance. During the time they made results on manila paper and presented the results.

“Jo [volunteer] was contributing a lot in preparation of constitution and by-laws. She prepared a draft constitution and by-laws with blanks for officers to fill in. Right at the assembly meeting, after validation of results, they decided to be organised. The officers filled out the blanks like name, frequency of meetings, general assembly, the terms of the officers. They were able to realise the organisation.”

“After that the volunteers were already out, so me and my assistant followed up on constitution and by-laws and they have them. But then came political issues at BISU. Protesters outside the gate protesting every day, speaking in the microphone. One of the leaders in Panas was one of the speakers at the protest and he was accusing Campus Director of corruption. According to him the UK gives millions to BISU for seaweed farmers but nothing is released to the seaweed farmers. This is where we were told by Campus Director to halt the registration for DOLE [registration with Department of Labor and Employment is a requirement for new organisations]. At the time I said the office will take charge of the registration, the travel, the food in Tagbilaran. But the Campus Director was offended so I was told to study first. So I didn’t take action in registration. But in fact they are already organised. In the Barangay they are having doubts because they really believe the UK gives us huge funding. We have a change of campus director but I was also accused of corruption by these people so I also became discouraged.”

On top of this, the local community believed that the university had received money to support seaweed farmers which had not been passed on. We wondered if this was a direct result of seeing British volunteers in the community. We went to the community to determine their perspective. We met with over 20 members of Panas Seaweed Farmers Association including the Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. They told us that the volunteers had taught them about changes and about the price of seaweed. We had only got this far into the meeting before the Secretary asked,

“Can we have a donation from the volunteers? Can we ask volunteers from other countries to get funds?”

Secretary of Seaweed Association

It was clear in our follow-up discussion that the community believed that volunteers have access to money which could help them. They also viewed BISU as an institution that receives money. This perspective was fairly entrenched, requiring a lengthy session with diagrams to describe how a volunteering initiative is a different kind of development in a way that was absorbed and understood. As *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* we effectively ended up doing some ‘myth-busting’ with the community about how volunteering initiatives work differently to aid or funding programmes. We explained that volunteers do not bring money or financial assistance. They bring their time, talent, skills and expertise. Registering the organisation with the DOLE is a way to access funds through government initiatives. This is what the volunteers were helping with. We also explained to them the fragility of their relationship with BISU and they wrote a letter to the extension office stating their interest in continuing with registration of their organisation. We took this to BISU, where they said this was encouraging. It was enough for them to say they would re-initiate efforts to push through with plans to establish the organisation legally.

In this example, a useful initiative and good work on the part of volunteers was affected by wider factors, including a change in political leadership and misunderstandings about the role volunteers could play in change efforts. It raises interesting questions about whether processes need to be put in place to explain the value and limitations of volunteering efforts at the community level as well as with local power holders, especially when initiatives span a change in political leadership.

Our time with the community revealed other potential sticking points that could prevent impact: a lack of trust among association members and diseased seaweed. They had received seed funding from the BFAR before to support people to set up as seaweed farmers. This money was supposed to be recycled for the next member to use but when people did not repay their debts the investment cycle did not continue and the project stopped. It became evident that the next injection of money would not be transformative unless they put in measures to make it easy to trust in the system.

Over the course of two meetings members generated ideas for improving accountability and transparency. Their favoured option was to make a verbal or written commitment to trust in one another and pay money back. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* encouraged thinking among association members about practical solutions which did not rely on the integrity of individuals but rather created a fairer system which they could all confidently buy into. Ideas included having a collector, having accounts displayed publicly, training in bookkeeping, finding ways to deal with diseased seaweed, and having an insurance system for those whose seaweed became diseased. Between November 2013 and January 2014 we saw no evidence that association members had worked to implement any of the members’ suggested strategies. The leadership remained focused on trying to attract investment into the association. This may be an example of reverting to the default assumption that organisations need money to start and not much can happen without this. It is something also encouraged by government departments, who tend to provide the initial materials or start-up costs but do not provide support to improve the social infrastructure of new organisations which enable initiatives to flourish. It served as another reminder to *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* about just how entrenched beliefs about ways of doing development can be. This social context can create a challenge for alternative approaches, like volunteering, which primarily uses people’s energy, talent, knowledge and skills, rather than direct financing.

Strengthening youth participation

A big part of ICS volunteers’ day-to-day work has been to establish and capacitate local youth groups to take action on environmental issues. In the context of environmental issues, young people regularly face hurdles to making their voices and ideas heard, even though they are greatly affected by the impacts of poor natural resource management (e.g. access to food and school restricted by flooding). When ICS began its work in Carood watershed, young people had no representation on the management council, and knowledge among this constituency about the risk factors and links to community wellbeing was lacking.

“One of the values of the ICS volunteers is that they are offering information that people don’t already have – about the Carood Watershed.”

Local youth organiser

The ICS volunteers have established and strengthened around 19 youth groups to work on environmental issues. On the whole, it has been very difficult to sustain the activity levels of youth groups in between ICS cycles. Sometimes as long as one to three months goes by without there being ICS volunteers in Carood. When the next cycle of volunteers arrive they usually find activity levels have dropped off in the absence of external support or encouragement. Groups are particularly poor at meeting regularly. If they are not meeting, they are not actively working on environmental concerns. They lie dormant until they get the next call from an ICS volunteer, which shows the difficulty of getting youth groups to a stage where they will sustain community-level action without the support of volunteers or a structured programme.

As part of their portfolio of activities, the ICS volunteers are asked to organise several Community Action Days, which are whole day events with the community to address environmental issues. In Guindulman, the VPS used his knowledge of the local area to support multi-scalar working in one of the poorest villages of the municipality. Nestled close to the shore, 90% of residents in Purok Punta in Tabajan are registered as informal settlers. Households have three to seven children each. They have a big waste disposal problem, and a lot of trash ends up on the beach. Over 100 people attended. But what made this coastal clean-up different was the wide range of stakeholders involved. Care had been taken to invite a cross section of people from the municipality:

- children
- adults
- local youth groups
- *barangay* officials
- Municipal Councillors
- Bohol Environment Management Office (BEMO)
- Municipal Planning Officer, LGU
- Municipal Agricultural Officer, LGU.

The day began with a combined effort to collect trash from the shoreline. Afterwards the ICS volunteers divided their efforts. Some tirelessly entertained all the children, freeing parents up to attend an introduction about volunteering, seminars on the Carood watershed and guest talks on climate change and solid-waste management. These were followed by quizzes and a raffle, with a variety of prizes from chickens to rice cookers.

Photo set 3: A coastal clean-up with *all* the community



Three months later we returned to the community to learn what people remembered from the day and whether anything had changed as a result. Most people were pleased the volunteers came to help clean. Adults and children participated in the clean-up but others did not attend because they were doing household chores, or they left on realising they were not going to be given anything. Others were very positive about the information they received and the activities on offer for their children:

“It was really interesting to clean the area because a lot of people were involved. It makes us more motivated. We were also happy even the children were involved. It is also enticing because foreigners came in and got involved. When we do it on our own once a month we only have the members of Punta and *Barangay* officials.”

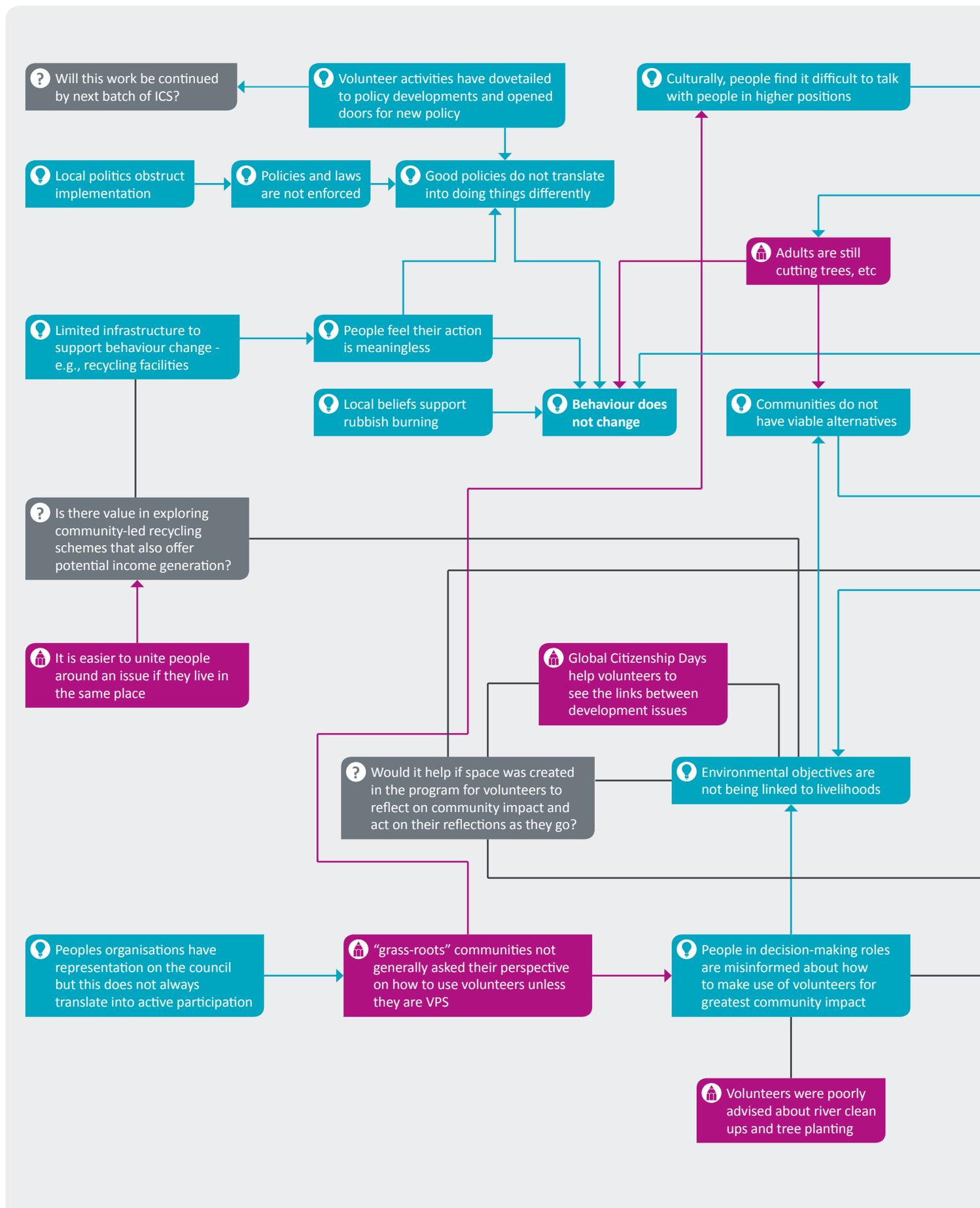
Community member, Purok Punta

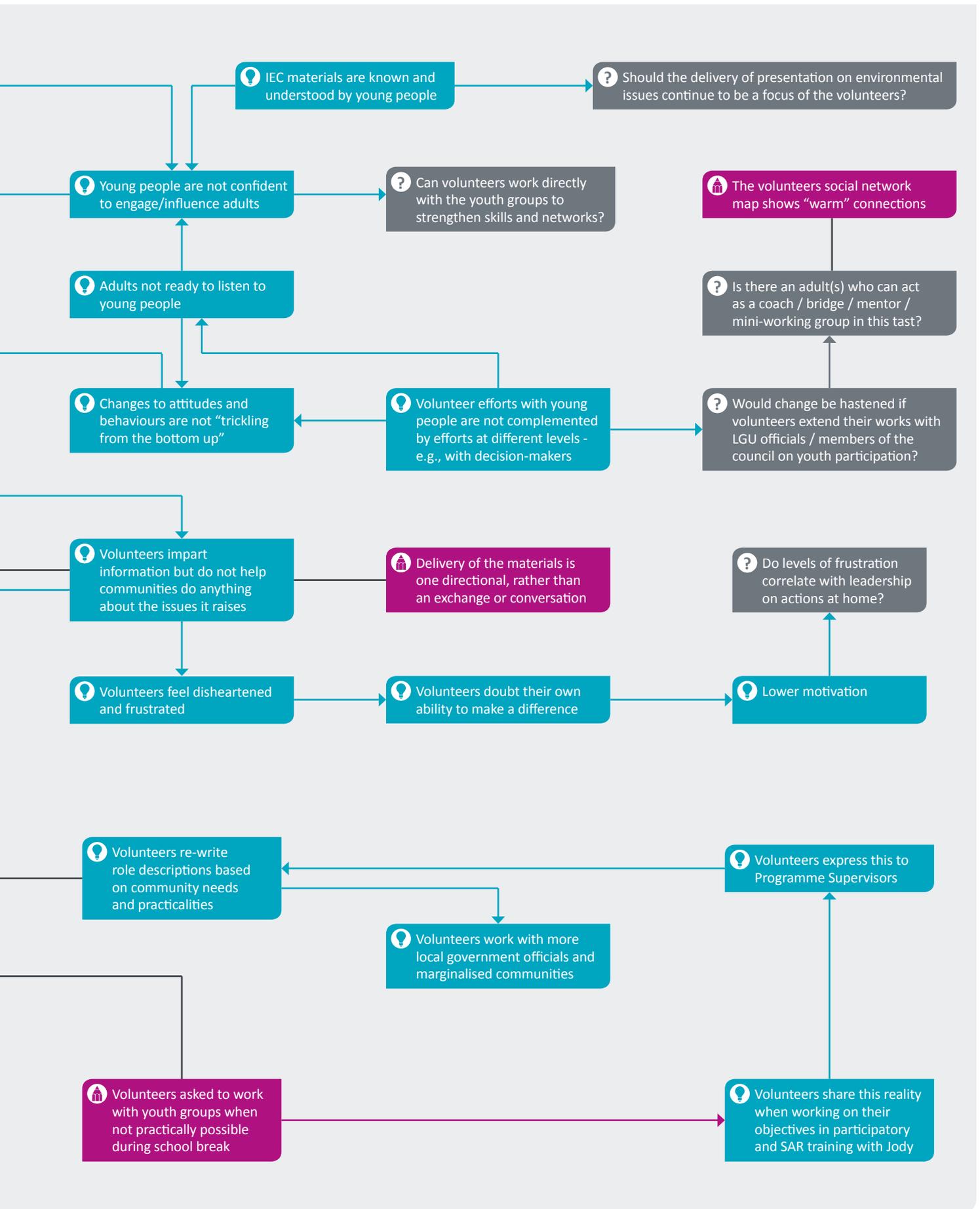
This motivation seemed particularly important in the context of the extreme weather events like typhoons which leave a lot of rubbish on the shore. This rubbish is not generated by the community but it does end up in their area of responsibility, affecting their surrounding environment.

It is hard to know whether the enjoyment experienced that day will plant a seed of long-term change for the community of Punta. Will they remain inspired to implement new initiatives to better manage their rubbish? Will the local officials walk away with a clearer idea of the barriers preventing more pro-environmental action among people living in poverty? We know that not all follow-up actions take place close to the point of intervention. For example, one group of participants – Basdio Youth Group – organised their own coastal clean-up in *Barangay* Basdio a couple of months later.



Figure 6. Issues map exploring barriers to youth participation and behaviour change in the watershed





Organisational capacity development

It can be difficult to link the work of volunteers at organisational levels to impacts on poverty. One of the things *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* learned is how difficult it is for decision-making bodies like the watershed management council to achieve much for its constituents without having the basics of a functioning organisation in place. One of the long-term volunteers worked at length to register the management council with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). Without this registration it was impossible for the watershed to secure and manage funding for community level projects.

At a slightly later date, a diaspora volunteer registered CWMFMC with the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), acquired the Tax Identification Number (TIN) and Official Receipts, and designed a bookkeeping procedure. In the process she audited the CWMFMC fund that had been entrusted to one of the six municipalities. Previous attempts to carry out an audit had been blocked so *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* was interested to know how this volunteer made it possible. There are a number of potential factors explaining her success. Firstly, they had an explicit remit in their volunteer placement description to establish a financial management system for the Council and the expertise to pull together a convincing case for an audit. Secondly, the volunteer was confident and determined. Perhaps she was perceived as having gravitas because she was from the same region of the Philippines, even though she had lived abroad for a long time. Perhaps the relatively short placement of the diaspora volunteer (three months compared to two years for international volunteers) reduced the risk of tackling an unpopular issue.

The audit revealed that the municipality owed CWMFMC 46,393 pesos (approximately \$1,000), instead of the claim that the management council was in debt by 114,663 pesos (approximately \$2,600) to the municipality. The total amount of money was repaid to CWMFMC in September 2013, which is now in a position to look after its own finances after a previous volunteer and their counterpart secured registration with the SEC. Local suspicions about what had happened to the money may have been an underlying reason why cooperation between municipalities had historically been difficult: each was required to donate the money to CWMFMC for joint projects in the first instance.

This is one example of how the work of different volunteers in organisational capacity development can build over time (months and years) so the cumulative effect is one where the organisation has both the legal remit and an example of good internal processes to manage its own money. The ultimate impact on poverty alleviation will depend on how decisions about the use of its funds are made. But it seems an important stepping stone that money and a transparent process for managing the money have been established.

VSO support to POs

Some groups benefit through their association to VSO Bahaginan via the volunteer programme. This support can be direct, when other functions (e.g. the development programme) of VSO Bahaginan support local communities.

“VSO Bahaginan helps when we do not know how to do this.”
Local adult volunteer/ PO member

For example, VSO Bahaginan secured initial funding from a donor to enable members of one PO to invest in ylang ylang seeds, a plant that produces an essential oil used in lots of perfumes. Study tours facilitated by VSO Bahaginan have also been very popular,

“We travelled to Leyte and Bacolod. I have ideas because of the exposure ... I was able to go in Rizal on an evaluation with all the VSO staff. I got plenty of learnings.”
Local adult volunteer/ PO member

The PO's relationship to VSO Bahaginan can also help indirectly. We were told how a formal link to an organisation like VSO Bahaginan helps the PO to be perceived seriously by other decision-makers,

“One of the staff of DENR approached me for agroforestry. They told me I give you 16 hectares for agroforestry in 2011. RED (the Regional Environment Director) knows me because I am present in CWMFMC meetings.”
Local adult volunteer/PO member

A Chairperson of a different PO mentioned the cross-study visit to Iloilo [which was funded by VSO] as

“the first time the Mayor has asked me a favour”.

The nature of this favour was an invitation to accompany the Mayor. They spent a little time talking to each other, during he was able to raise the PO's issues. Was this valuable?

“Yes, the Mayor said that after the election, they will act on the suggestions.”
Local adult volunteer/PO member

While it is difficult to know whether the Mayor's promise was genuine, other local actors also suggested that getting their issues known was an important first step to securing change. The presence of volunteers helped the POs to do this.

“When the first batch [of volunteers] arrived, we were able to let the youth and others know about the existence of the People's Organisation. This was important because the people knew about us and we were not like a ghost ... awareness increased.”
Local adult volunteer/PO member

When asked what change this had led to, the Chairperson pointed to an increase in membership of the PO and the increased awareness among government officials (e.g. in the DENR) about their work.

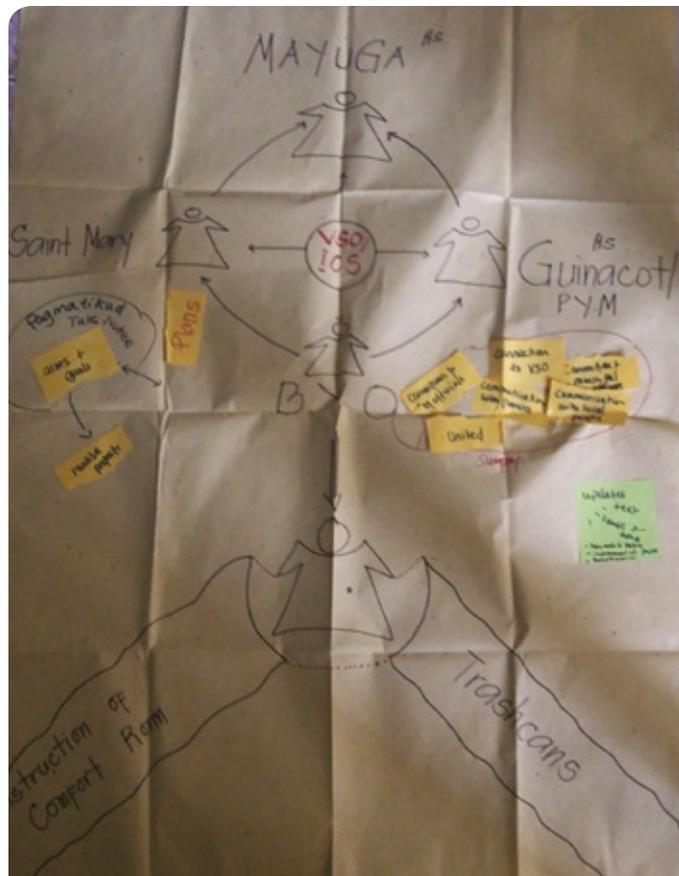
Sometimes contact with volunteers made local people's change efforts feel more possible. An 'if you can do it, we can do it' mentality contributed to feelings of self-belief among local youth groups. A couple of the groups channelled this energy into organising their own talent shows with environmental themes and coastal clean-ups. For example Basdio Youth Group was set up by ICS volunteers between March and May 2013. The youth group depict VSO/ICS at the centre of their map describing the most important connections and activities that had taken place to begin the process of realising their goals for a trash can and construction of a comfort room in their *barangay*. ICS volunteers also linked them to two other local volunteer organisations, Guinacot PYM and Saint Mary youth group.

A member of Corella New Generation Leaders Organisation in Ubay explained some of the challenges they faced when organising a local community event. It was hard to go to adults to solicit advice because they would say the youth group couldn't realise their plans. With the ICS volunteers it was different. The volunteers drew on their own experiences to help the youth group to think through practicalities. Local adults were surprised when it was such a success.

These insights begin to indicate how platforms for volunteering can begin to shift local social norms about what poor and marginalised groups are capable of.

"After hearing about some impact in Bohol I realised we are doing an important role in transforming culture – the transformation of youth volunteers, we've challenged their energy into something development oriented. But also we're transforming a culture where development roles are owned by the adults, by seniors."

Staff member, VSO Bahaginan



Our research found this to be a slow process. It took 8–12 months from exposure to the work of outside volunteers to locally initiated implementation of ideas and, when it did happen, it was only among a select group of *barangays* and youth groups. The initiative then had to be perceived as a success to start to change people's minds about their own and others' capabilities. This takes time and it happens most amongst people who have been actively engaged in the change story in some way.

Implications:

- Infusing volunteering work on environmental issues with the concerns and priorities of people living in poverty requires a conscious and intentional effort, which is not guaranteed by placing volunteers in locations where poverty is prevalent.
- The use of local strategic frameworks to guide volunteering for development activity is problematic if the local processes for setting priorities are not participatory or inclusive of marginalised groups.
- Greater concentration of volunteer efforts may be required to tackle entrenched problems, and more follow-up may be needed to mitigate unexpected impacts of local events (e.g. change in leadership) that contribute to poverty and marginalisation.
- Community confidence to tackle development challenges can result from volunteers and communities working together. This learning and the self-reliance it encourages are important resources which allow local change to take hold.
- Monitoring and evaluation needs to account for quality of engagements rather than quantity of people engaged, if volunteering is to support capacity development for outcomes like asset reform and active citizenship.
- If follow-up actions initiated by communities sometimes take place away from the point of intervention and impact is sometimes the result of cumulative efforts by different volunteers 8–12 months down the line, then volunteer organisations may need to find ways of making the most of these ripple effects in their efforts to support change.

Volunteering is a social activity, contingent on relationships



When volunteers are effective, how do they do it? What are the mechanisms or triggers of effective volunteer activities and projects?

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.

Relationships improving effectiveness

In reviewing their achievements against council objectives and what made them possible, youth volunteers identified that they work by intentionally building relationships. Young people seem particularly effective at building and connecting people through networks. An analysis of their individual social network maps showed how much they had grown over three months

“This time there were a lot of people close to me so it was harder to eliminate people from the map.”

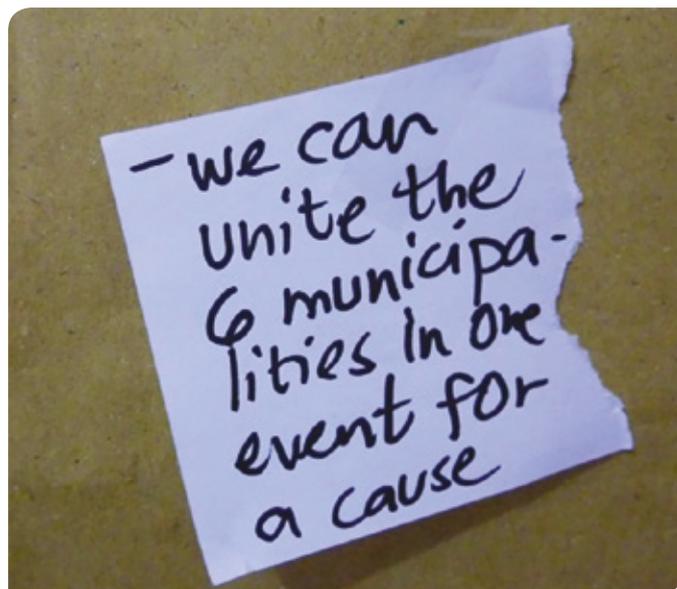
British ICS volunteer

“The connections are from high positions in the community ... they were able to bond with us and they supported us if we asked something.”

Filipino ICS volunteer

The fifth cycle of volunteers identified they had collectively made over 60 new work connections to organisations in the watershed and strengthened a further 30 connections. They engaged radio stations, *barangay* officials, DENR staff, youth groups, politicians and DRRM offices in their work on the watershed.

We found examples where volunteers had used their networks to increase awareness and cooperation with watershed management concerns. For example, they ran community events (e.g. fun run, youth fest) that required cooperation of the six municipalities in terms of resource mobilisation, modelling cross-municipality working on watershed issues. At the grass-roots level, the volunteers wanted youth groups and residents from municipalities to get to know one another. At their end-of-placement review, one of the volunteers reflected that “we can unite the 6 municipalities in one event for a cause”. While this is just a first step to greater collaboration, its timing was potentially significant: the community events happened during a period when council meetings (e.g. formal spaces) were infrequent and irregular.



By revisiting initiatives months down the line to look at the lasting effects of these social connections, we found examples where local actors had replicated activities designed and run by ICS volunteers. The staff member at the Regional Health Unit who borrowed the structure of a volunteer-led health sanitation day for his own municipality learned about it because the volunteer organising committee leveraged their network connections to invite him to speak at the volunteers’ event. In other cases, we learned how local youth volunteers got inspired by the work of ICS volunteers to organise coastal clean-ups and community events.

When we compared volunteers’ social network maps at the beginning of their placement with how they looked at the end, we found that these formal ‘work’ connections were supplemented by informal connections to local people through the family members of their host homes and friendships. On reflecting on how her social network map had changed over time, one volunteer said,

“I noticed that my connections were initially emotional rather than business. They became friends and they helped with work later on, by linking me etc. Over time they became business connections.”

British ICS volunteer

These connections often end up helping out, improving the effectiveness of volunteer interventions. For example, we found “trusted” motorbike drivers who accompanied youth volunteers into schools to translate awareness-raising seminars,

“Otherwise just the teachers understand.”

Motorbike driver/local volunteer

The outcome of relational processes often emerged organically as with the example above. One day, the motorbike driver decided to help out, and this set a precedent going forward. The structure of the ICS placement strategy makes it easier for volunteers to make and share informal and formal connections quickly. This was not through formal meetings to construct networks deliberately or forums to share contacts. The programme design was enabling of a more emergent process to take hold, which built from people's inherent motivation to connect to those around them. For example, host homes link volunteers to host parents, siblings, cousins and family friends. At a later date some of these people help out the volunteers in their work. The simultaneous placement of around 20 volunteers means that as a group of actors, they have ready-made links to the six municipalities through personal connections. So, if one volunteer would like to invite the youth groups in a neighbouring municipality to attend their event they can run the request through another ICS volunteer who is already known and working locally.

Adult volunteers also reported on the value of friendships to their wider work.

"[She] has given me support being here – with phone, workshops, finding venues ... all sorts of practical things. She is the first person I ask. She knows people."

Volunteer

Sometimes, friendship came before effective working relationships with placement counterparts. Reflecting on a turning point in a working relationship,

"When we got the office and truck, we travelled together and we got close."

Volunteer

In order to foster relationships, volunteers revealed that they spend a large part of their time doing things away from their specific areas of work responsibility.

"I thought the investment project was a waste of time. They threw it at me and I couldn't see the point of it. We lived through that together and we managed to produce something the Regional Environment Director (RED) liked."

Volunteer

These opportunities – while appearing a waste of time – can end up being what the volunteer described as "strategic". In this case, work on this side-line project enabled the volunteer to gain the trust of co-workers in the government departments.

"At the time I thought the investment portfolio [project] was the ugliest thing I had met but it was actually strategic ... there wasn't a strategy but it worked that way to have us all working on one thing."

Volunteer

Through the project, the volunteer gained the trust of co-workers. The shared experience of struggling with something and then achieving the praise of a senior official forged a relational foundation for working together on other activities.

Activities outside core placement responsibilities also included attending dinners and going to community events. The people volunteers met often became important work contacts, but the initial reason for making contact was social. The space in volunteer programmes to invest in relationships made this possible.

"Yes it was important we are allowed to go to things that on the face of it are not completely related, as we meet new people."

British ICS volunteer

But from a traditional development programming perspective, this time spent meeting people could be seen as speculative, or treated in a wholly instrumental way. Because the volunteers are embedded in community life they have reasons to invest in relationships that extend beyond their specific work remit. But the end result nevertheless adds value to community development, in much the same way social capital research has shown how network connections and associations strengthen individual and community resilience and wellbeing.

For example, we learned that when volunteers live in a community over the long term, they often get involved with other voluntary work in their free time. These side-line projects can be completely different to their day-to-day work, but they often result in the linking of local causes to international social networks. In Bohol, donations were made to local NGOs, and educational scholarships were given to children through volunteers. Following the earthquake in Bohol in October 2013, international volunteers raised money through networks back home to help with relief efforts.

Networking is specified in the local strategic framework (the Carood logic model), reflecting the ultimate aim of the CWMFMC logic model for stakeholders to work together "for the benefit of the present and the future generations". But work to establish and build social relationships is not emphasised as a key mechanism in VSO's global theory of change and it was not specified as an important building block in the ICS theory of change we reviewed. In a session with ICS volunteers (cycle 5) designed to map volunteers' micro journeys of change to macro theories of change, a copy of VSO's theory of change for the ICS programme was shared and explained to volunteers. Examining the short-term and longer-term outcomes, volunteers were asked to work in groups to rank the outcomes based on what they have seen happen most, and consider any outcomes they would add or take away. A proposal was accepted by the wider group of ICS volunteers to include "connecting organisations through networks" as a distinct short-term outcome not already captured in the theory of change. Table 4 shows how they ranked the outcomes, with number 1 signifying the most prevalent changes they created.

Table 4: Group ranking of community development STOs and LTOs according to ICS volunteer experience

	Short-term outcomes (STOs)	Longer-term outcomes (LTOs)
1	Changes in resources, practice and awareness in host organisations and communities	Changes to policy
2	Connecting organisations through networks	Behavioural and material changes in host organisations and communities spanning key sectors of activity
3	Changes in attitudes/perceptions towards young people	Host communities better able to support their own development

Volunteers felt that “connecting organisations through networks” captured their activity in the community to bring different individuals and groups together. It characterised how they worked to bring about change more than “infrastructure development”, which they removed from the short-term outcomes list as nobody could think of examples where they had acted to improve infrastructure.

Interestingly, the fact that volunteers from the outside are supported by local people to do their work is not acknowledged or reflected in change frameworks. This is usually the remit of the counterpart.

“It starts off with my counterpart helping me – taking a bus, language, working out who all these people are. You have not figured out motivations so you rely on this person to interpret the world around you.”

Volunteer

But in reality, support networks stretch much further into the community.

“The youth volunteers come to the PO and ask for help and so we are supportive.”

Local adult volunteer/Member of PO

This support is usually in the form of logistical, cultural, technical or contact information that volunteers are lacking to realise project plans. Volunteers could pinpoint strategic people in their networks who were well connected, and whom they kept going back to in order to ask for information and connections. Similarly, local youth groups benefited from connections to other youth volunteers in neighbouring municipalities. These meetings often came about through the work of ICS volunteers organising community events.

When either the spontaneous or consistent work of local volunteers to support structured or more formal volunteering programmes is not acknowledged in project design, then these efforts are often overlooked. They certainly do not receive any funding or resources to compensate time or support activities.

Relationships motivate

Volunteers coming from the outside are working in a new location, across language barriers and in cultures and work contexts very different to those they are used to. The workplaces are usually less well resourced than organisations at home, and the issues they find themselves working on are complex, messy and sometimes highly political. As one long-term volunteer in Bohol put it,

“It is hard to get satisfaction and not go crazy.”

Volunteer

When volunteers do manage to navigate the challenges and curve balls and remain in placement it is often because their work or home situation have become motivating in itself. An important part of this is the relationships they form. When these are going well, people will see a placement through to completion.

“In a way, this [pointing to the “neighbours” area of the social network map] was my saviour. It was going well and I felt we were doing something worthwhile. Without them, I would have left.”

Volunteer

Volunteers can be motivated and inspired by community members. Moments of shared laughter, interest and joy can make a difficult day bearable. In more troubling times, feelings of solidarity and a history of shared experiences keep people engaged. They help to make things feel more possible. The reciprocal value of these social processes means that they can be as important for community members as volunteers.

“We experience good relations as if we are almost relatives ... what we feel, it becomes lighter because of the concern we experience.”

Local adult volunteer/PO member

Sometimes, it seems that a work partner or close friend is the only one who can appreciate how difficult a particular task was to manage. The nods of approval, smiles of encouragement and words of understanding help them to push on with their work. When volunteers like people, it is easier to help. They become more responsive. A colleague’s problem becomes in some part their own. In other words, they become personally invested.

“Then I felt I should stay because the counterpart needed a friend in a hostile environment.”

Volunteer

By contrast, when relationships are not in place, volunteer self-esteem, happiness and motivation begin to plummet. Frustrations begin to surface. Communication becomes harder. The volunteer begins to withdraw. The community become less receptive than they were before. Volunteers think about leaving. This spiral of decline is not characteristic of every volunteer or every stage in the life of a volunteer placement, but, when it happens, it can drastically affect the productivity of the volunteer and also the relationships that support change to happen.

One of the challenges for volunteers in CMMFMC was a lack of organisational people to work with. If the volunteer work was directly with the LGUs or the POs this was not so bad but for volunteers placed in roles (e.g. capacity building) with the council itself, it was very difficult to establish work relationships. This is because there were no ‘organisational people’ to engage and develop relationships with. As one volunteer reflected,

“In this job I have realised how important it is to work in a team with other people. I am more than capable getting on and doing a job by myself but you don’t give up a well-paid job to come half way round the world to sit on an office on your own looking for people to work with ... I don’t think I realised how important it was to me.”

Volunteer

In effect, these volunteers were being used as staff to plug a resource gap, not as capacity-builders working alongside an existing workforce. The relational component that is inherent to the structure of capacity-building roles was missing. Relationships built on solidarity and friendship are not easily fostered within tightly defined project parameters or volunteer job descriptions despite their importance for making change happen. Where volunteers have a designated person or team to work with, especially over long-term placements, people have the time and space to form personal connections. As this study of the ICS volunteers has illustrated, the programming of shorter placements is benefited by a set of initial conditions or a social infrastructure which help volunteers create effective relationships for change quickly.

Improvement of social and communication skills

Most volunteers also have to do some work to strengthen their interpersonal skills, in order to establish and nurture effective social relationships. The biggest challenge for 'outsider' volunteers is to get themselves understood easily and trusted quickly. This can mean learning the local language and speaking more slowly and clearly. For 'insider' volunteers, the biggest challenge is gaining confidence and getting comfortable communicating with people different to them (e.g. people in positions of authority like *barangay* captains, management council members or foreign volunteers).

"The people are not willing to go to high ranking officials. They need to be registered. But they don't register. They don't feel able to. They don't have the confidence to."

Filipino ICS volunteer

At a midpoint review with volunteers (cycle 5) many personal goals focused on confidence and public speaking. So far, they thought these aspects had improved between 30% and 75–95%, indicating that language and communication would be an ongoing challenge and commitment area over the course of the placement.



Volunteers who can speak the local language – Visayan – are highly valued by communities and co-volunteers. For example, Pilar LGU hoped to receive a Visayan-speaking youth volunteer because they were keen to translate solid-waste management materials devised by previous volunteers into Visayan so the community could more easily understand them. The work of *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* in Bohol was wholly reliant on the translation skills of local volunteers. As one participant expressed spontaneously in the middle of a discussion,

"It is really good if there is an interpreter because we can understand each other!"

Secretary, PO

Certainly, international volunteers feel more effective when they know some of the local language and any effort to try is greatly appreciated on the part of communities. Diaspora volunteers who speak Visayan and know something of the local cultural context seem to be able get to work quickly, but they may also face additional challenges that our small sample did not identify.

Implications:

- By working through formal and informal relationships volunteers create opportunities for change to happen.
- Volunteers can improve engagement across different kinds of stakeholder (e.g. local government official, young person, resident, DENR), helping to diffuse responsibility, energy and learning across many change agents instead of a few.
- Volunteer networks serve as a way of bridging a diversity of actors and activities, making the transfer of ideas easier.
- If change is happening through networks and relationships, then volunteer organisations should look to social network analysis and mapping techniques to broaden mechanisms for capturing these sorts of developments.
- If relational processes are key to the way volunteers affect poverty then social networks and relationships should be identified as a pathway to impact in organisational theories of change. To put into practice these findings about relationships, volunteer programming may need to reconceptualise volunteering as a social activity, asking what it means for placement strategy that social networks and relationship building directly influence the effectiveness of volunteers. For example, shorter placements are benefited by a set of initial conditions or a social infrastructure which help volunteers to quickly create effective relationships for change.
- Factors such as use of host homes, space and time in volunteer programmes to establish relationships in informal settings, and a critical mass of volunteers working on the same issues within a locality all help volunteers to establish networks that support their work.
- *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* wanted to learn more about the salient features of relationships that matter for change processes. A more detailed inquiry in Bohol looks at the patterns of social interaction and relational styles that reliably support positive and sustainable change. Findings are presented in a separate case study (see Appendix).

When volunteers work at cross-purposes



The multi-layered approach to volunteering in the watershed presented *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* with a unique opportunity to explore how different kinds of volunteers work together, and how they interact with a multi-stakeholder partner like the management council.

There is a complexity to development efforts within the watershed, with multiple projects and programmes instigated at different levels of the system (e.g. national government, local government, community) and all occurring in combination. Even the volunteering component is diverse, incorporating different kinds of volunteers (e.g. youth, skilled national, skilled international) for various lengths of stay (e.g. three months, six months, two years). Contextual information (e.g. local objectives, needs) is important for understanding why a volunteer intervention might be useful. But it cannot explain how and when volunteering is going to be an effective intervention. For this we need to think about the collective impact of volunteer combinations and how to synchronise them.

Responding to local priorities

In May 2013, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* collected stories of change from communities, volunteers, and individuals supporting volunteers. Some were positive (e.g. volunteer contributions to creating land use plans; strengthening connections between stakeholders from different municipalities; increased awareness of Carood watershed; more enjoyable work). Other stories were more ambivalent or negative (e.g. repeated reorganisation of youth groups rather than action; the additional work involved in supporting volunteers; disillusionment). In fact, every person we spoke to had a slightly different perspective based on their own set of experiences. Gradually, we were able to identify common threads in the issues that emerged from the local realities of different stakeholders. These patterns informed a systemic picture of the dynamic interplay between different volunteer efforts and the theories of change.

The CWMFMC log frame lists different activity areas but it does not assign an order of importance. Talking to local actors in May 2013, including VSO volunteers and members of POs, it emerged that there were some clear priority tasks, either because they were enablers for other objectives or because they were urgent issues for people living in poverty. These included:

- the development of livelihoods for POs
- financial capacity of CWMFMC to attract inward investment for project
- an engaged council where POs and LGUs are able to play a more active role in setting priorities.

At the time, there was a single long-term volunteer attending to the last two tasks with the work counterpart, but nobody was working on the first task and groups of youth volunteers were working on something entirely different. The ICS youth programme is the biggest volunteer initiative operating in the watershed in terms of volunteer numbers and financial support. When the first cycle of youth volunteers arrived, the council members did not know how to make use of them.

“The first batch just arrived without asking what they could do. CWMFMC was just told they were coming ... Some placements had nothing for them to do.”

Volunteer

It was decided that young people would work to raise awareness for the watershed, but this was difficult at first because the youth volunteers all said different things. It became a ‘damage limitation’ exercise to organise the creation of materials to standardise the messages. The situation forced the council to come up with an IEC strategy, which is one of the activity areas in the CWMFMC log frame, but as the long-term volunteer emphasised,

“It [IEC strategy] wouldn’t have been my priority had the youth not been there.”

Volunteer

Theoretically, the idea that youth volunteers can help out with less urgent objectives which council members and professional volunteers cannot attend to is not a bad one. But it is built on a number of assumptions that do not hold true in reality. There was widespread consensus among stakeholders that all volunteers coming ‘from outside’, whether youth or adult, short-term or long-term, require a lot of support during the first three months to be effective. Without this support, volunteers themselves admit they find it difficult to do anything useful. The structure of the ICS programme in Carood not only requires that volunteers are supported, but that they are supervised and guided. Practically, the local response to dealing with this time commitment clustered around three main strategies:

- Council members in VPS roles and long-term volunteers get pulled into supporting the youth volunteers and neglect priority projects, which in some cases directly relate to the needs of the poorest members of the watershed: the farmers and fishermen who are trying to secure sustainable livelihoods. It can take up to 60% of an individual’s work time to support the youth volunteers. Even a long-term volunteer admitted to spending 39% of her time supporting the youth volunteers.
- Council members try to do both, juggling competing demands by supporting the young volunteers in non-work time.
- Council members do not supervise young people. They get called away to deal with other work priorities, and volunteers go it alone. The success of the placement often hinges on the initiative of the volunteer. The strain of the additional work was evident in other areas of the ICS programme, where community members needed to be persuaded and cajoled into opening their homes to volunteers.

While these are pragmatic responses, they don't help the overall direction of travel towards effective natural resource management. Even the ICS volunteers whose primary project was the IEC work recognised it was not going to lead to transformative change in the watershed. Their efforts need to be complemented by other activities,

"If they [ICS programme] carry on with the environmental thing, they need to link it to livelihoods."

"We have been doing a top-down thing. The idea of VSO is to be participatory. But we are not giving them any options."

And the POs feel that change is slow:

"They call officials to the office and they write problems in paper like this. We always tell them the same problems ... We are always meeting but nothing happens."

In fact, there are recent reports that one PO has disengaged from Carood activity altogether because the return on their investment of time is not enough. Active membership at the council has ceased to be valuable to them.

The influence of top-down pressures

We find a situation in Carood watershed where ICS was able to push ahead implementing and realising its theory of change and VSO Bahaginan was in a position to realise its objective of using volunteering as a platform for greater youth participation. But the process of investing and supporting youth volunteers was, at least initially, disruptive to realising priority objectives in the local strategic framework.

"I can see if that if you are sitting in London or Manila and you have these youth and you can see [referring to the CWMFMC plan] that so much needs to be done ... but it is scattergun rather than systematic."

Volunteer

We found a lack of flexibility to work to local priorities is compounded by top-down processes. CWMFMC has never really been in a position to negotiate what kind of volunteers come, how many volunteers come, when they come, how long they stay or what strengths they have (e.g. environmental background, knowledge of local language). These factors are either all fixed at the point of funding (e.g. volunteer numbers) or unknown until the point of volunteer arrival (e.g. volunteer strengths). CWMFMC have to do their best to accommodate what they get. The consequence can be a volunteering programme working at cross-purposes, rather than in harmony, with the work of local council members.

At the scale of individual volunteer placements, it was possible to see how some have been carefully designed. At the LGU in Pilar, the young people's attributes made them effective spokespeople (see Story 2) for LGU concerns, so the extra work to support youth volunteers complements, rather than distracts from, organisational priorities. This makes supporting the volunteers a strategic use of time. However, the placements that are doing well still experience similar difficulties to other stakeholders. If they could input into the way the programme is run, they could improve the relevance and effectiveness of volunteering for their goals. For example, the Placement Supervisor in Pilar said that, given the opportunity, they would like the volunteers to stay for longer.

"The first month the volunteers have to establish contact and connection. In the second month they work with us but it is about preparation. By the third month their stay is fruitful."
VPS

And if they could get at least one volunteer who can speak Visayan they will be able to push ahead with plans to translate environmental materials into the local language.

There also seemed to be a lack of coherence between different volunteering programmes that are operational within Carood. A long-term volunteer there to support capacity development and improve governance of the council spent over a third of placement time supporting youth volunteers to make up for a shortfall in capacity. In this sense, the introduction of youth volunteers at a time when the council is 'weak' was not fully understood locally.

In other situations, staff and volunteers of the council office have been pressurised to undermine established governance practices to accommodate organisational timelines to place a volunteer.

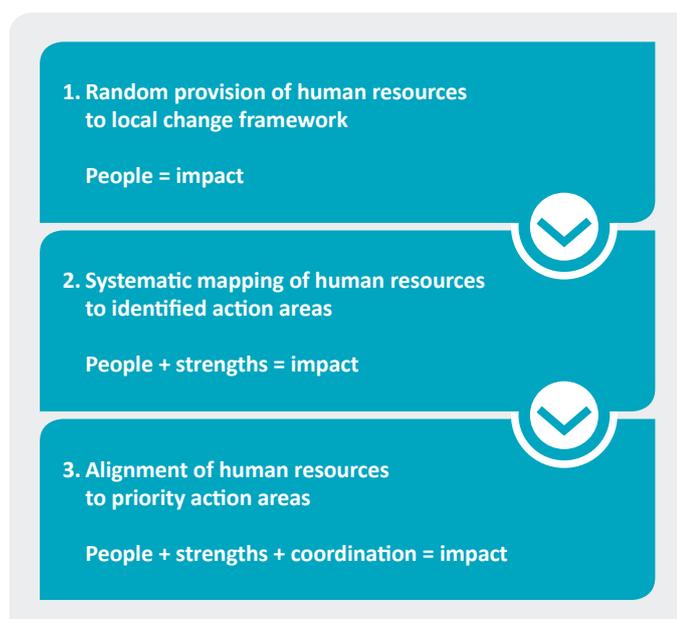
"We didn't see the placement [information about a new volunteer] for a long time. There was one day in October when we had a meeting where we had not seen the placement information or a résumé. I was a volunteer and my counterpart is just the secretary of the council. We informed VSO that we had to take it to the council meeting. We were threatened about not missing the deadline but we could not organise a council meeting at short notice. We refused to make the decision by the deadline [on behalf of the council] and the volunteer still came."
Volunteer

By taking these actions VSO risked destabilising their own governance and participation objectives. Organisational pressures (which can be driven by funder requirements) to place volunteers urgently can end up devaluing local governance processes.

The importance of coordination

With lots of different volunteers, making different demands on the same council members, coordination between volunteer platforms becomes really important. Otherwise, volunteers are effectively competing with one another for time and priority with council partners. We learned that it is not enough to allocate people to natural resource management plans without thinking about how volunteer attributes match identified action areas, or how these identified action areas complement each other (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Getting strategic about volunteering: learning from Bohol



The move from box 1 to box 2 was partly reflected in January 2013 at the Annual Programme Review, where it was decided that a human resource plan would help the management council and VSO Bahaginan organise volunteer efforts more effectively. It was subsequently developed, mapping how different volunteers fit together in a coherent and systematic way, but there is little evidence the document was used by VSO Bahaginan staff or the local management council to inform decision making, either in volunteer recruitment or to secure additional funding to allow volunteers some resource for project implementation. When a new VSO Bahaginan staff member was appointed locally with responsibilities for managing the diaspora programme, she was not aware of the document to inform her work.

Box 3 reflects learning from the research indicating that another factor is needed in decision making if volunteer efforts are going to respond adequately to local priorities: coordination. In intricate and long-term change processes like the implementation of a cross-municipality natural resource management plan, it is not just important what a volunteer contributes but when they contribute it, and how this contribution is purposively linked to other volunteer efforts. This ensures complementarity rather than efforts that work at cross-purposes. A level of systematisation may be particularly important in situations where local partner resources are limited. Programmes do not have to be linear in their approach but they do need to be able to grapple with how cumulative volunteer efforts add up to a significant change for people living in poverty. Our findings question the local assumptions we heard that “something is better than nothing”. Deciding on the nature and arrangement of different volunteering opportunities can be as important as creating them.

Communication among stakeholders

Communication and coordination between stakeholders in the change process (e.g. volunteer–volunteer; VSO Bahaginan–volunteer; CWMFMC–volunteer; CWMFMC–community) is a big challenge area for the watershed. There are numerous examples of information not changing hands:

- Very little exchange of information about the activities of different volunteers, either through formal or informal mechanisms. For example, arrival and leaving dates of volunteers in the watershed were not known to other volunteers or stakeholders. As one long-term volunteer summarised,

“There was no coordination between the different volunteer strands.”

In fact, the approach taken by the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* research to intentionally move information around the system between different actors was often welcomed.

- Volunteers not in regular contact with VSO Bahaginan
- Relevant meetings communicated at the last minute to volunteers
- Lack of regular meetings of the CWMFMC and no fixed schedule of upcoming dates
- Confusion surrounding evacuation of volunteers post-earthquake in October 2013
- Lack of understanding among communities about the identity, role and activities of different volunteers. As one local youth volunteer explained,

“the mind, the thinking is totally different from one volunteer to another”.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines was not in a position to explore all the reasons as to why communication and coordination does not seem to be adequately supported. But we did identify some pointers.

Lack of activity at the council level made it very difficult for volunteers to work in a mutual partnership with the local decision-making body. They can request attendance of members at meetings and they can ask for support in specific activities but the council as a whole is not proactive or forthcoming in working alongside the volunteers to input opinions, feedback or guidance (see more in the section below on “How the governance system of local partners influences volunteering”). Often volunteers are effectively working in parallel with the council. This is especially the case with the youth volunteers, who have minimum contact with the council as a decision-making body even when they have fostered individual one-on-one relationships with council members.

It seemed strange to go to the trouble of having different sorts of volunteers working in Carood and have such limited coordination between efforts. On discussing this with VSO Bahaginan volunteer support staff we realised that work in Carood is organised by volunteer platform (e.g. international, diaspora, national, youth) and not by development goal.

“So, someone is responsible for youth volunteers, someone for diaspora volunteers, someone for long-term volunteers, someone for national volunteers ... so if you want to know what is happening with secure livelihoods you have to go and talk to each of these people ... what we need is someone with oversight.”

VSO Bahaginan staff

We explored this a bit further. Why is development work organised by volunteering platform? We realised that there is not one funder for VSO’s work in Carood watershed. Different funders support different types of volunteer. For example, USAID funds the diaspora volunteers, DfID funds the youth programme.

“So, this means that essentially our development work is organised by funder.”

VSO Bahaginan staff

With all the funding and programming coordinated around the specific volunteer platform, there is little space to strategically influence how all these pieces of the puzzle fit together. From a change perspective, this is inadequate. It explains why people sometimes feel VSO is in the business of placing volunteers rather than the business of development. It explains why volunteer placements can appear scattergun rather than strategic. And it goes some way to explain why coordination between volunteers within the watershed is so difficult. Each staff member has a certain set of volunteers to look after. This is their remit. But there has been nobody in place with a work responsibility to share information, insights and learning across the different platforms. The risk is that volunteer efforts remain piecemeal. At best, they cannot strengthen and build from one another, and at worst one programme goal (e.g. governance and capacity development of council members) is disrupted by another (e.g. greater youth participation).

We identified potential opportunities for VSO Bahaginan to respond to these issues, such as using the Development Programme (VSO Bahaginan’s programme framework) within head office to make the linkages needed to organise volunteer efforts around local change priorities. As one VSO staff member explained,

“ICS has its own interests. Its main interest is to provide an opportunity for British young people to know about development and apply for jobs in the future. We cannot deny this reality of the programme. But we also have our own realities in this country ... If we are to tailor the programme to the development plan of the organisation and serve it as one of the tools that can help address the needs of the community, it can be beneficial for us.”

VSO staff member

Another discussion took place about creative use of different funding pots to resource communication and coordination. A more global discussion started about how to educate funders about the local programming issues of silo funding. In recent years, work on development effectiveness has tried to discuss and tackle this, and a wider literature is available about decision making in highly complex environments. There may be an opportunity to adapt some of this learning to a volunteering-for-development context more specifically.

Implications:

- Having clarity about how volunteer efforts integrate into multiple change outcomes (e.g. cultural, environmental, economic) at different change scales (e.g. community, organisation, management council) at varied time frames (e.g. immediate, medium and longer-term) is important for effective programming.
- The processes (e.g. recruitment) and constraints (e.g. funding) of volunteering programmes can create demands on available resources of government and community partners, leaving high-priority work under-resourced.
- Multi-layered volunteering for development needs accompanying systems to be in place to support coordination and communication to strengthen and build on change efforts between actors.
- Development interventions can unintentionally be driven by funder priorities and/or the separate design of different volunteer platforms, not by local needs.

Working in politically sensitive environments



Transformative outcomes in development rarely surface without some direct engagement with the power dynamics that persist to benefit the few and disadvantage the majority. How do volunteering interventions engage with this reality?

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.

The politicisation of environmental work

Environmental work in the Philippines is not a very safe occupation. Between 2010 and 2012 the DENR reported 20 deaths of forestry workers and environmental advocates working alongside civil society partners like forest cooperatives. Before 2010, violence against DENR workers was not as severe. Alyansa Tigil Mina and Kalikasan People’s Network have reported the deaths of 17 environmental activists since the current Aquino administration took office.

Volunteers work with DENR officials, and some PO members would qualify as environmental advocates in their protection of community-based forest management areas.

In the Carood watershed there have been a number of incidents of concern to international and local volunteers. A DENR contract worker was found dead under suspicious circumstances in an area frequented by volunteers. Intentional forest fires in one of the forest management areas required that PO members mobilised to put out the blaze through the night. Concerned for their security, they felt reassured by the presence of members who carried a gun.

These are peripheral events but they nonetheless affect how safely and effectively volunteers can contribute to CWMFMC objectives. Some community members were not comfortable speaking in open forums about illegal environmental activity. Corruption in local politics is everywhere – like a cancer, the local people say – making it very difficult to know whom to trust with information about illegal logging and other activities that degrade natural resources.

Change processes have also been slowed by local and national politics. We learned about a change of Mayor affecting the trajectory of work completed by ICS volunteers with seaweed farmers (see more in the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work”). Local elections have also hindered progression of the council. SEC registration was first tabled in 2002, but nothing happened until a long-term volunteer arrived in 2010 to make a resolution to start the process.

“The volunteer helped me to revive the council. I think that makes their accomplishment the SEC registration for the council ... Before the volunteer’s arrival the council had discussed it in 2002 and then no-one really dares to follow up with documents or registration.”

DENR staff

And why was it the case that no one dared?

“The LGUs are led by Mayors. They are good for three terms. The momentum set by the first is not the priority of the next ... and there is a change of staff ...”

DENR staff

Within the CWMFMC it took the arrival of a diaspora volunteer to persist in carrying out an audit of the council finances (see more in the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work”). With no operating budget prior to this for council activities, the work of volunteers and CWMFMC was affected for months. People had to use their own money or used money from other pots like the ICS budget. One volunteer revealed that she and her counterpart pay for things like ink, the printer, and transport to get to meetings (for example, to realise the SEC registration). “On a bad month, it can eat into your stipend pretty bad.” This reality was experienced by a counterpart also:

“So we did it from our own money. The travel to Cebu [another island]. Some of the money came from the partners grant for the pilot ICS ... We had five volunteers here on the third cycle so we put this money together and used it for processing SEC and for chairs, tables and cabinets.”

DENR staff

Sometimes the work vehicle used to travel around the watershed broke down and there was no money to fix it.

This example reflects the working culture of the CWMFMC, where members tend to avoid unpopular issues, rather than tackle them head-on. The agency of members of the council is clearly affected by its leadership culture (see more in the section below on “How the governance system of local partners influences volunteering”). Sometimes volunteers coming from outside can navigate the internal power dynamics that prevent organisational development, but it does not always make them very popular. Playing this role with decision-makers can mean colleagues find it difficult to trust them. Sometimes volunteers are used to do people’s ‘dirty work’ without realising it. In one case a volunteer was asked to work on a project that involved re-tracing steps, but staff at DENR were not very cooperative.

“They were very suspect and not helpful. They would not tell me things even if they had done stuff.”

Volunteer

It turned out the project was one that a senior official wanted re-doing. This meant that

“No-one would confess they had worked on it because they were ashamed of it. They didn’t want to admit it was wrong.”

Volunteer

Some of the members of CWMFMC are political figures, either in local politics or in national government departments like DENR. People’s alliances and personal interests mean the management council is not a neutral player in the environmental protection of Carood. In practice, this means that people with the most power on the council are connected to other national and local government initiatives that they want the council and individual actors to prioritise. In at least one example, members of the council have guided POs to take on projects that are of questionable benefit to poorer members of the watershed (see Story 4).

Development is a tricky process and the motives of all those involved are not always transparent. This is especially the case when investments are of a commercial nature. There has been a lot of discussion about private–public partnerships in the Philippines and a lot of recent chatter on international development networks about the land access and acquisition as powerful drivers for food growing, especially for countries like China with increasing economic might but fewer natural resources.

This reality was either not obvious to DENR officials or it was overlooked because of other pressures. The political environment was too sensitive for *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* to fully understand why the PO had been advised to take on a contract that exploited its members without putting researchers and local actors at unnecessary risk. We can only speculate based on unverified information and a wider knowledge of the Philippines context that the pressures could be explained by one or more factors including: deference on the part of local government officials to national policies looking favourably on private–public partnerships connections to friends in high places; payments to officials for helping the deal to go ahead; and not losing face with an investor once the terms of the agreement had been outlined. Other research in the Philippines has shown that even when governance is devolved, it can retain and deliver ideas from central agencies about what constitutes appropriate local behaviour and action towards nature. This is not always in the interest of marginalised communities. Arrangements can also be co-opted so they place more power in the hands of wealthier families and increase livelihood insecurity for poorer families.

Story 4: Navigating private–community partnerships for development – the unique contribution of a volunteer

In May 2013 one of the POs, which looks after a Community Based Forest Management Area in Carood watershed, signed a contract, in the company of government officials, with a private investor to cultivate cash crops like pineapples for direct export to the Chinese market. The PO would give over some of the land for a limited number in years and in return the deal would lessen the hassle of having to market and find a buyer for the crops.

Work began to prepare the site. The PO used *bayanihan* – a traditional Filipino term akin to volunteering – to provide labour to create an 8km access road through the middle of the farmland. Then a diaspora VSO volunteer arrived from the US to do some capacity-building work with the PO, especially in organising their financial systems. During the training process, the PO asked her to take a look at the contract. She had experience in the corporate world designing financial systems and reviewing business contacts.

Immediately she could see from the MOA that there was nothing in the clauses that benefited the PO as a whole. The Chinese investor intended to use the PO’s land and hire day labourers.

“I coached them in how to go to the bargaining table with the Chinese ... The Chairperson was confident in talking to the relevant Department for Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) because of the notes I gave her. She called it her ‘cheat sheet’.”

Volunteer

The investor and the PO have still not been able to agree how to rectify or nullify the contract. The investor may not fulfil a commitment to cover the 100,000 pesos (approximately \$2,250) that has already been spent on crude oil for initial work preparing the land. Illustrative of the systemic unfairness that characterises many of these sorts of investment, \$2,500 is a small sum for a multinational company but a mountain to climb for a group of farmers. While the experience has been a stressful one for the PO, the Chairperson on balance describes it to me like having a lucky escape.

“It is an eye opener for us not to sign the contract without counselling from others. We learned a lesson ... We have volunteers helping us, looking at the contract. Because of the volunteer maybe the Chinese were afraid. If ever he has a plan to fool with us and now he learned this organisation [the PO] cannot be fooled with because of the recognition of the Carood Management Council.”

Chairperson, PO

The PO always strives to improve the income of members, but it is not willing to do this at any cost, because it feels accountable and responsible to the people who live and work on the land. This is the sort of asset reform VSO Bahaginan advocates for in its country strategic plan.

The PO did have concerns about the contract, but had only limited prior experience it could bring to bear on the situation it found itself in. The volunteer came with a different perspective on private investment to the prevailing local view, which she used to examine the contract critically. Having spent years living in the West, she was in a position to recall lots of different examples – probably good and bad – of how relationships between financial investors and communities have played out. Through this exposure, her barometer for assessing opportunities like these is fine-tuned to the persuasions and powers of big business. The PO did not have the same sort of experience in this arena. But it did have someone it could trust, in the volunteer – someone whom they had got to know through their work together; who was impartial; and who did not stand to gain from the situation through the advice she gave. The PO was able to make use of the volunteer’s life experiences and apply them to its own situation.

Political agendas rarely benefit poor and rural communities in the Philippines, making asset reform and active citizenship even more important indicators of progress. In a national *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* forum discussing the role of volunteering in poverty efforts, the Secretary of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) stated that Asset Reform is a core plank of its poverty alleviation strategy.

“What does this have to do with volunteering? The most important of the areas for volunteering would be helping to organize the poor, providing intellectual resources and confidence for negotiating this new terrain. Helping the poor is not just helping them to participate effectively into invited spaces. It is about supporting the poor developing the capacity for collective action. The more capacity, the better especially because poverty reduction is not a picnic, there are many contentious issues. The poor have to have capacity in those contentious spaces.”

Secretary, NAPC

The role the diaspora volunteer played in Story 4 was not in her placement description. It was a side-line query that she responded to and it placed her in an interesting position. Her motives were true to the CWMFMC log frame but this did not escape the conflicting interests between members (e.g. the government officials and the farmer representatives). She was championing the concerns of the least powerful in this dynamic to influence how change happens, going against the interests of the most powerful to get an agreement that really worked to support livelihoods and alleviate poverty.

In so doing, the volunteer and the PO Chairperson worked together to try and rebalance the interests of all those involved, with the hope that ‘development’ of the land will not benefit distant shareholders over its stewards and residents. If it were up to the PO, it would have ended the project altogether but it was under local pressure to push ahead. Unfortunately, the volunteer’s placement ended before the situation with the Chinese investor was resolved. What *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* cannot answer is whether a longer placement on the part of the volunteer would have ensured a reversal of the contract or whether local power plays would have ultimately won out. But the account does suggest that volunteers in the form of short-term advisers are not by themselves sufficient to successfully support communities in drawn-out negotiations with powerful actors about the direction development should take.

Implications:

- The aspiration of volunteer organisations and their volunteers for a pro-poor development is not always shared amongst local power holders who can affect development trajectories.
- ‘Outsider’ volunteers (e.g. diaspora volunteers) can input valuable knowledge and life experience which communities can use and apply to their own situations in negotiating contracts, agreements and decisions that will affect their development.
- Short-term placements are not by themselves sufficient to successfully support communities in long negotiations with powerful actors about the direction development should take.
- It is not easy for volunteers to engage in highly political situations safely or effectively, raising questions about the sort of training or organisational support structures which could help.

How the governance system of local partners influences volunteering



Like many areas of development work, initiatives attempting to improve natural resources are affected by governance structures in place to facilitate change. The Carood watershed presented *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* with the opportunity to explore the work and agency of volunteers in relation to a representative body like the management council.

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 the basic requirements of good governance like 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.

The realities of representation

On paper, CWMFMC has all the hallmarks of a well-governed policy-making body for the watershed. Its membership is multi-stakeholder, spanning local government units, people's organisations, NGOs, the academe and indigenous peoples (the Eskaya tribe). The IMFN management process, to which Carood watershed belongs, promotes transparency, accountability and collaborative work among stakeholders. But the realities of people's interactions with CWMFMC tell a different story.

We found examples where POs had not raised their concerns at council meetings, even when issues they are facing have direct implications for the sustainability of the watershed. Many agricultural communities describe their own participation in change efforts as limited to attending trainings. The wider perception among POs and volunteers is that the Mayors and DENR officials direct in meetings, and they have to follow.

"For us POs, every meeting we are just like a puppy listening to the Mayors and DENR. They call meetings and they direct."

Local adult volunteer/PO member

There is an aspiration that the POs will one day get the chance to "handle the meetings." Interestingly, this is not so far removed from the governance structure the council *should* be working to. It is supposed to be the LGUs and POs leading, with some expert technical support from DENR. But actually DENR is pushing and, to do this,

"they shoot things at the council to get the council moving ... The Regional Executive Director will shoot something out that is flavour of the month (Forest Management Portfolio; PES) and gets all his staff engaged even if they are not interested. And then you have the youth programme doing it as well."

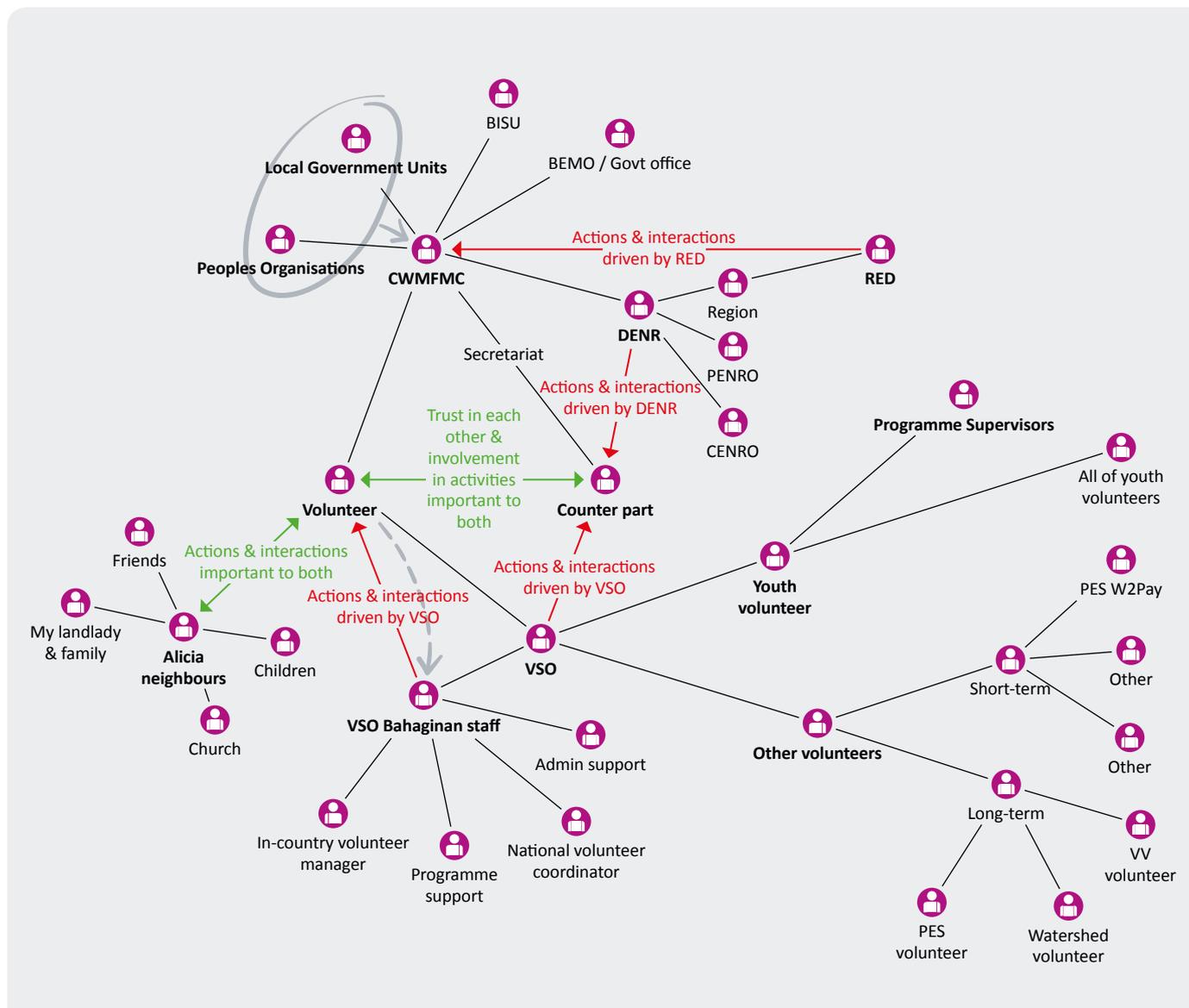
Volunteer

A long-term volunteer depicted this relationship in a social network map of the main people they had affected or been affected by during their work and life in Carood (see Figure 8). The grey line around the LGUs and POs indicates who should be leading CWMFMC meetings while the red arrows show who is really directing priorities and activities. Department for Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have a lot of influence in council meetings and through directing the secretary. VSO also influences the volunteer and the Secretary of the council. In practice, this means their requests and ideas command the most attention among staff and volunteers actively working on watershed concerns. Another volunteer explained,

"Their [VSO Bahaginan's] interventions seem to be about parachuting volunteers so they get funding. It is not about strengthening the work in Carood or strengthening the partnership."

Volunteer

Figure 8. Social network map illustrating power dynamics in Carood watershed



The POs face two big hurdles. The first is feeling able to express their opinions, ideas and suggestions in council meetings. The second is being able to elevate those concerns above the priority level of the most powerful in the room. As the constitution is written, the POs and LGUs should have the power. The LGUs get the equivalent of three votes and the POs get one each, totalling seven. But as it plays out they

“are just reacting. Not coming up with ideas.”
Volunteer

A lot of PO members are elementary graduates, so they find meetings difficult to understand. Reviewing a government contract for mangrove plantation with another PO, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* learned that all the MOAs are in English, making them more accessible to government officials than members of the coastal community.

In the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work” we highlighted how young people face similar challenges. They do not feel their work is respected or valued by the council as a whole. In their own analysis of how change happens, volunteers recognised that it is not only credentials or responsibilities that matter, but the way different actors approach their work. Passion often trumps positions of authority if you actually want to get things done,

“From the start I thought she would be good. She was in a good position – contact to the Mayor and access to vehicles and contact to the youth groups and for fundraising for events ... position in networks is important but we realised she had other priorities.”
British ICS volunteer

At the same time, local youth groups, in particular, acknowledge that greater council support would encourage them and make the practicalities of doing work on the watershed easier. For example, there are concerns that recent volunteer work by the young people to establish a youth federation will be difficult to sustain because the council is both too weak organisationally and too limited financially to support youth engagement.

The lack of representation of POs and young people has serious consequences for effective management of the watershed. At the moment, council meetings are not a space where everyone can speak freely about priorities, concerns and opportunities. As a result, insights from the most active members working on the CWMFMC log frame are not heard at council meetings. This means that the council cannot learn about innovations and challenges in volunteering practice and environmental management emerging from the many initiatives and activities taking place in the watershed. For example, the POs are implementing new agro-forestry techniques, with members relying on their success to eat and live. They are leading shifts in alternative livelihoods away from fishing. They are managing local implementation of the National Greening Programme. They know better than anyone what is working and what is not. The young people have information about local perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that affect degradation and increase risks to the watershed. They are mobilising local young people, an energy base which could be more effectively used by the management council to effect social change within communities.

The obstacles to proper representation from poor and marginalised groups are not structural, they are cultural. The council operates as a hierarchical structure, with the senior members instructing and ordering other members. This command-and-control style of leadership is considered an outdated model for effective natural resource management but it is typical of how government has historically engaged with poor and marginalised communities in the Philippines. The interaction is directional and instructional without space for genuine participation on the part of 'beneficiaries'. We have evidence of this from our interactions with coastal communities in Candijay, Bohol. The following extract is reported from the end of a 1.5-hour session with a coastal community who had demonstrated extensive environmental knowledge about the importance of mangroves for livelihoods. During the conversation they also shared that they had been planting mangroves in the Carood watershed since 2004.

- *Valuing Volunteering*: "Do you know see yourselves as experts in planting?"
- *Community*: "It is like planting rice. It is Easy. There is measurement."
- *Valuing Volunteering*: "It strikes me that you have a lot of expertise in how to plant, where to plant, the distances etc. Does anyone come and ask you for advice?"
- *Community*: "There was a guy who came to teach us. He was a government employee from Iloilo who came here. When he was still active, DENR sent him here to teach."
- *Valuing Volunteering*: "Has anyone come to learn from you?"
- *Community*: "No."

The one-way nature of the relationship between government officials and community members is evident in this example. We also learned how it is not uncommon for new initiatives or projects to go through the motions of developing MOAs without respecting or incorporating the community's knowledge or priorities, s this excerpt from a discussion with a different coastal community reveals:

- *Community*: "We usually accept the projects but when we see the agreement it could be different."
- *Valuing Volunteering*: "Have you ever made any amendments to Memos of Agreement (MOAs)?"
- *Community*: "We can't really change the MOA because they have made it."
- *Valuing Volunteering*: "Can you see an advantage to writing the MOA together?"
- *Community*: "This is better. So we can share."
- *Valuing Volunteering*: "Share what?"
- *Community*: "Like what kind of proposal."

In the way CWMFMC – and its government members – go about their business, there is zero acknowledgement of the commonly referenced fact that technical expertise and local knowledge both make an important, but equally limited, contribution to the management of the system as a whole. The smaller relational study carried out in conjunction to this case study found examples where ICS volunteers made effective use of informal spaces to navigate existing power imbalances in the watershed governance system. At times, however, the volunteers also inadvertently created an imbalance in their interactions with community members, particularly when roles and responsibilities for making change happen locally were not distributed among actors (see Appendix).

Local government workers can also find their contribution to watershed issues constrained by institutional protocols. Culturally it is very difficult for them to disagree with people in positions of seniority, especially in public forums, and they are unable to attend meetings without sign-off from managers or the Mayor. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* learned about incidents where junior staff members in government departments are shouted at and publicly humiliated if they make a mistake:

- "Everyone felt they were in this big monster together. When you come out of it and produce something that made everyone look ok. The Director liked it and he wasn't going to come and yell at them."
- Volunteer

In their haste to get things done, VSO Bahaginan can reinforce the command-and-control leadership model in place.

- "They [VSO Bahaginan] don't get a response from the council so they go to the person they do get a response from – RED [Regional Executive Director]."
- Volunteer

Managing the urgency of meeting funding proposal deadlines was a particular issue:

“The other thing that really surprised me was VSO Bahaginan putting together a bid for the Philippines and there has been zero consultation in the Carood office. They may have spoken to RED [Regional Executive Director] about it. They needed the MOA for it... They [VSO Bahaginan] put together a MOA for DENR and VSO and cut out BEMO [Bohol Environment Management Office].”

Volunteer

International volunteers can sometimes intervene here. On one occasion a long-term volunteer reported sitting down with their counterpart to look through, and throw out, CVs of potential volunteers. She thought it had not previously occurred to her counterpart that they (and the council) could have a say in who is sent. This was partly seen as cultural:

“They do not perceive that they could not agree.”

The volunteer’s hope was that since going through the process of reviewing CVs, the counterpart has

“more confidence or an ally to say no”.

Volunteer

The CWMFMC and VSO Bahaginan could have worked to intentionally weaken power plays and the importance of credentials between different actors, creating a space where everyone can speak freely about priorities, concerns and opportunities. In so doing, knowledge and responsibilities could have been more equally distributed across members. Instead the change process has been stubbornly slow, hampered by low activity and capacity among council members on watershed issues.

Issues of voice and participation, particularly among less powerful actors, are well documented in the development literature. It would be interesting to further explore the role volunteering plays in finding creative ways to work with existing governance systems and power imbalances. While only indicative, the findings point to a potential role for volunteers in becoming allies to people living in poverty, providing support and validation to local concerns, which may slowly shift the relationship between duty-bearers and rights-holders.

Activity and capacity

Concerns about the level of activity of CWMFMC has raised questions about whether there is continued value in volunteers working for Carood. As one volunteer summarised,

“CWMFMC is not a grass roots organisation. It is an organisation of Mayors and local government officials. They have taken charge of it and they are the ones not making a difference in their own municipalities.”

British ICS volunteer

It is not just that people taking the lead are not governing well. They are not active either. There are numerous examples that indicate limited activity on the part of the decision-making body, including:

- long stretches without council meetings and no forward-looking schedule of fixed dates
- outdated MOAs outlining management responsibilities of volunteers
- absent and overloaded counterparts and placement supervisors, which has not been addressed
- lack of capacity development of council members (e.g. POs)
- poor attendance at meetings/trainings
- huge delays in operationalising the framework for Technical Working Groups (TWGs) which are supposed to be driving forward aspects of the logic framework.

As an illustration of the last two points, funding had been secured by VSO Bahaginan to get a workshop delivered by a Singaporean expert to support development of the TWGs.

“It was about leadership from TWG, what we can learn from the past. Clearly must not repeat what we have been doing for last 10 years and must need a different approach ... it was one of the biggest missed opportunities.”

Volunteer

Attendance was very low – approximately seven people – despite the fact that the council had been talking about it and trying to get dates for nine months. This made it difficult to disperse the learning across council members. There were ongoing concerns for many months about the TWGs being too large to make meetings possible and allow facilitation between members. At 30 people the group never managed to convene. Through the work of international volunteers, the TWGs have been reconfigured at around 11–13 people as of November 2013 and are currently meeting.

When meetings do not take place, new ideas and initiatives cannot be discussed. This can affect the motivation of volunteers when there is no formal outlet for all their work. When volunteers begin to perceive their commitment to CWMFMC objectives is not matched by that of members of the council they begin to question whether the time and effort they give to Carood is worthwhile. Volunteers from outside the watershed wonder if they would be better committing their energy to another project, somewhere else. And POs think about disengaging from volunteering and the work of the council, frustrated by the slow pace of change and its irrelevance to their day-to-day lives.

Sometimes lack of activity is linked to a lack of capacity or competency on the part of CWMFMC. In the case of volunteering, there is great variability in the capacity of members to effectively channel volunteer effort so it has most impact on the environment. Supervisors and counterparts are often overloaded, or are called away at the last minute to attend a meeting or work on a project. They cannot refuse requests from supervisors, so supporting volunteers drops off their list.

“We tried to contact her. After the meeting in the school I texted to see if we could meet to revise our weekly plan because the schools are closing so work with youth groups in school is not going to work. She was in Cebu at the time so we didn’t meet. And that was the last time I text her because she didn’t reply to us after that.”

British ICS volunteer

The volunteers struggle to assert their need for assistance because they are lower down the hierarchy. In other situations, they have been poorly advised on locations for tree planting and river clean-ups. Short-term volunteers who have less time to adapt to the local context before their work activities begin have benefited from different tactics to verify the information and advice they receive from officials (see more in the section below on “How learning systems help volunteering innovation and improvement”).

Receiving and managing volunteers has been a learning process for LGUs and POs, so it is unsurprising that not everyone gets it right first time. Over the placement cycles some LGUs like Pilar and Guindulman have been really successful in identifying volunteer strengths and aligning them to local priorities (see more in the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work”). But it is not clear how effectively this learning is being moved around the system to benefit other municipalities and volunteer placements.

Implications:

- Volunteer interventions are unlikely to be able to singularly act as a route to alleviating poverty if a local partner(s) is not already meeting the basic requirements of good governance like participation, inclusivity and collaboration.
- The internal processes development organisations use to place volunteers can unintentionally undermine good governance.
- Volunteers can influence local governance cultures, but this process takes time.
- The potential for volunteers to find creative ways to work with existing governance systems and power balances merits further investigation, particularly as a route to strengthening volunteering as an intervention.
- Local volunteers should not be neglected in development efforts. From a natural resource management perspective, local volunteers create a redundancy of human resource in the system, which can sustain action when some change agents are lost (e.g. when VSO volunteers come to the end of their placement).

Community perceptions of volunteer programmes affect the trajectory of development efforts



How do first impressions affect the changes volunteers are hoping to bring about?

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 with 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.

Making sense of volunteering

Communities will often report that it is 'nice' to have volunteers. They are interested in and curious about their presence. Usually an experience makes them feel 'happy' and 'excited'. But when *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* digs a little deeper, confusion and misunderstandings surface about volunteering. Often community expectations have not been met, which can leave people feeling disillusioned about the benefits of volunteering.

One common perception is to see volunteers, especially foreign ones, as money:

"In the Barangay they asked what will the volunteers be doing? We explained they would be assigned to Carood watershed to preserve this to help community members to preserve their environment. I was asked, "are we going to get rich?" I said no, but they will really help you ... I was thinking what is the connection between that initiative and getting rich ..."
Local government worker/Assistant VPS

When volunteers do not provide gifts or money, communities feel disappointed. They can vote with their feet and remove themselves from activities.

"I went because I thought we would be given something. So I went home when I learned we were not getting anything."
Community member, Candijay

At an absolute minimum snacks and drinks are provided every time a volunteer meets with the community or vice versa, which requires a financial input. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* had budget to cover these costs, but many volunteers – international and local – do not. Partly this is about the importance of hospitality in Filipino culture, but a precedent has also been set by NGOs and LGUs, which may influence what communities expect of development efforts more generally (see Story 5).

Story 5: How NGOs work with communities

"This is a story about how NGOs work with communities. When NGOs work on their own, people come to sessions but they come for treats and then they leave. There is a subsidy provided for those who are poor provided by the government to communities. They receive help from the LGU like food, rice and farming. If the NGO is working with the LGU, the LGU has control because they can deduct the subsidy. This should be a good thing because the people observe what should be the objectives of the NGO. But it is not a good thing because the LGU use the subsidy to force the people to follow the objectives of the NGO. It is not the willingness of the people to follow. I learnt this from a bus conductor in the Carood watershed. He suggested because people here look for something they can gain, try to make sure you draw out the willingness."

Filipino ICS volunteer

Sometimes volunteers do not have the time or the skill base to address a community's priority issue, and this limitation is not understood at the community level. This happened with the Eskaya tribe, who desperately want an access road. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* said it would tap some contacts to see if there was any access to market schemes, but we could not find a funder who was interested in the idea. VSO Bahaginan was eventually able to respond to PO requests for more experienced volunteers who had some knowledge of environmental issues, by introducing the national and diaspora volunteers, who had a remit to work directly with them. But the process of writing and winning funding proposals to support these programmes took a long time, lengthening the gap between the needs expressed by council members and the placement of a relevant volunteer. The sorts of constraints coming from outside the watershed that influence the change process remain opaque to people with no experience of how the international development system works. The experience of development can be particularly confusing to communities when projects come to discuss needs but follow up with activities that do not address priority issues.

"We asked for labor to build a road to market. We were given 22 goats. The request was answered, but with goats. We were very confused."

Local community official

People in positions of responsibility in the community are left to explain failed attempts to get help to residents. At other times decisions made at the programme level do not make sense to people. For example after the earthquake and typhoon in October 2013, long-term volunteers stayed but youth volunteers were evacuated after the event. While VSO did consult with the VPSs about this decision, the reasoning behind it may not have reached other community actors. For example, in December, everywhere *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* went we were asked why the volunteers had left.

Improving perceptions

It is difficult for volunteers to change misperceptions. It takes more than a conversation. Some host homes had little idea what the ICS volunteers actually did day-to-day, even though the volunteers lived with them throughout the placement. In particular, the spirit of volunteerism is not clearly understood at the community level. For example, people in people often think volunteers are being paid.

Volunteering is a powerful but also delicate force for change. For change to happen motivation sometimes needs to work both ways, so that volunteers get a lift from the community as well as the other way round. But this relies on community-level actors understanding why someone becomes a volunteer and what contributes to a rewarding experience. When this happens incidentally it can improve the impact of volunteering. For example, the eagerness of one youth group to learn and develop really inspired an ICS volunteer, who went back to the UK to raise money for their project as part of their follow-up 'action at home'. Volunteers have now used this money to leverage additional local financial support from the village government and begin building community toilet facilities at the local beach. This was the first dream of the local youth group when they set themselves up. There is scope to more meaningfully nurture this process through raising levels of community understanding about how to get the best out of volunteers (Aked J, *Bohol Action Research Inquiry*).

One way in which understanding seems to emerge is through community members being directly involved with the work of volunteers. One PO that has worked directly with youth, national, diaspora and international volunteers developed its understanding about volunteering over time.

"Volunteers did not bring money. This is ok. It matters to us that they are serving. They are role models. Even residents [members of the PO] receive positive opinions about volunteering. They are saying 'the foreigner came here to volunteer'. They learn about the environment, about care of water."

Local adult volunteer/PO member

Including people in active roles is possible when there is an initial willingness to engage. But when communities are not interested, volunteers are challenged to even get ideas off the ground, before they are in a position to demonstrate what they are about and what they are trying to achieve.

"Some of the schools are not accommodating. The volunteers are volunteers of Carood watershed. They [the teachers] think the project is solely based on tree planting. So they ask 'why are they concentrating on solid waste management and not tree planting? We are not interested in having them.' There are things that are interrelated – to do with the 7 risks around pollution and waste management – but it like they are listening without hearing."

Local government worker/VPS

In an end-of-placement reflection session on progress towards community outcomes, an ICS volunteer involved in this project said,

"For vermiculture it does not feel like progress yet because the teachers do not know who we are or what we are doing. Need to get the teachers on board first with a seminar. They have negative view."

Filipino ICS volunteer

The approach they decided to take is to start with two schools and build from there.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has frequently heard volunteers say that one of the conditions of their success is the 'willingness of the community'. Volunteers often enter development work with an assumption that the community is going to be as receptive as they are eager to help. And they come unstuck on realising that the willingness is not always there.

Sometimes volunteer expectations for change are too high, especially when they are working more on the iterative side of community development rather than contributing to ready-made projects. But it is also the case that communities are not always eager to get involved. It turns out all sorts of things affect willingness, either working in isolation or in combination. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* has identified the following factors as important:

- low self-confidence/belief on the part of the community
- counterparts not trusting themselves with the volunteer
- previous negative experiences with volunteers
- seeing that the change process is complex and difficult, so easier not to engage
- what outsiders see as needs not corresponding with what local people see as important
- timing – other priorities and commitments prevent people from engaging
- people becoming fatigued by repeat visitors
- personal, social or economic costs of participation that can often be hidden from the volunteer.

These factors hamper communities and partly explain the long-term nature of work on poverty. The good news is that communities are not homogeneous entities. This creates opportunities for volunteers to harness local interest. We found that if projects begin small, they can create the space they need to find the people who do have energy. They might not be the usual leaders, but they just might share the volunteer's passion. Effective volunteers find who they can work with and build it up from there. As a VSO staff member confirmed,

“They find ways round difficult individuals by strengthening their networks/relationships elsewhere. They create opportunities.”
Staff, VSO Bahaginan

Other volunteers find ways to make their effort or initiative relevant to the community. In Pilar the volunteers assisted by joining an existing community-level project which already had momentum. They didn't try and start something new. They bolstered the efforts of local volunteers (See the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work” for more on the work in Barangay Cansungay).

Valuing Volunteering Philippines found that it is often volunteers' interpretation of a situation that affects how they feel about their own worth as volunteers. Through its engagement with cycle 6 ICS volunteers on this issue, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* was able to identify some attitudes that can help volunteers keep going.

When we feel we are the only ones driving change it can be good to remind ourselves of the following:

- For a set of various good reasons (which may be clear to or hidden from us), people may not want our help right now. And this is OK.
- If we are starting from a low base we should switch our focus to moving the boulder just a little, seeing our activities as part of a process of easing change. This may mean our job as volunteers becomes about building momentum and making it easier for the next volunteers, rather than delivering to a set of project objectives.
- When levels of participation rapidly sink from high to low as we get into the messy, complex process of making change happen, we shouldn't despair but celebrate! Fewer participants usually equals more participation. And it means we are beginning to identify the local people who will sustain our efforts. The first follower is often an under-appreciated form of leadership. We should nurture them and not dismiss their importance because the total number of participants does not meet predetermined beliefs about what good attendance looks like.

These reminders are relevant to all sorts of volunteering. They speak to the niche that volunteering might occupy in providing the energy and encouragement needed to ease long-term change processes. They also highlight the connection between volunteer perceptions and their own sense of wellbeing. This in turn can impact how effective volunteers are as change agents (see more in the section below on “The benefits and burdens of participating in volunteering”).

Implications:

- There is work to be done to improve literacy about volunteering for development at the community level.
- The factors hampering communities are not always visible or evident to volunteers.
- Volunteers may need to adopt a different approach when navigating low community interest. They may have a particular niche in easing the process of change, rather than working to specific project objectives.
- The fact that communities are not homogeneous entities creates opportunities for volunteers to harness local interest.
- Understanding of the factors that affect community engagement in development should help organisations to set more realistic and contextually relevant goals for volunteering.

The benefits and burdens of participating in volunteering



The benefits and burdens of participating in volunteering are well documented. But how are they shared among local actors in the change effort? And what does this mean for development?

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, ICS volunteers 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 leads to 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.

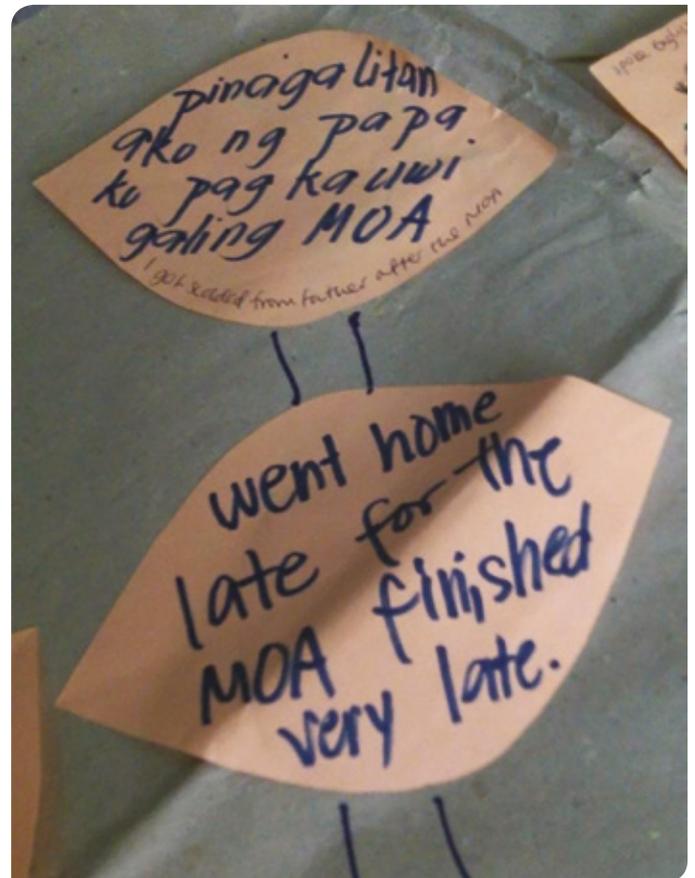
Engaging people living in poverty in volunteering is one factor enabling pro-poor development. But it is not sufficient to translate into changes that positively affect equality and poverty. This is because participation in volunteering can result in benefits and burdens, depending on the nature of the experience. The quality of the volunteering experience matters, not only for the individual involved but for how these personal journeys of change are translated into development outcomes. By examining the volunteer experience from the perspective of different actors in the watershed, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* was able to ascertain how benefits are accessed and shared.

The hidden costs of volunteering

Valuing Volunteering Philippines found that role strain is common among local volunteers who have to manage their volunteer commitment alongside competing responsibilities. Active PO members talked about the strain created in their personal lives by attending to CWMFMC issues. They have to explain to family members why they are at meetings and not working on the farm. Young people also have conflicts with parents and school schedules when volunteering interrupts household chores and studies. One youth group's members were struggling with school work because they were busy in their volunteering work. Others reported being scolded by parents for arriving home late or by community peers when activities did not work out.

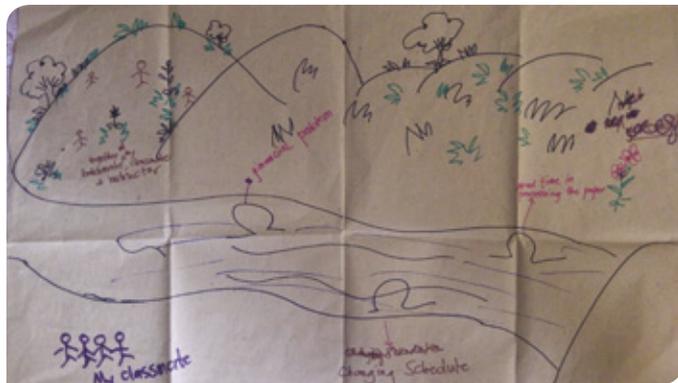
"I gathered the people and prepared snacks. But suddenly the whole thing was cancelled. I felt disappointed at being scolded by the daughter of the Captain. And all the negative talk was falling to me. I was blamed."

Local youth volunteer



Other local volunteers specifically mentioned lack of money as a barrier to participation. As the only unpaid members of the council (Mayors, LGU reps, DENR and VSO staff attend as part of their job), POs have to pay to attend the meetings. One PO explained that his organisation does not always have the budget available for transport to meetings and members have no salary. Once, the municipality refunded travel but not again.

Youth volunteers had the same challenges when volunteering incurred travel and lunch costs.



As a result, local volunteers are not being adequately compensated for their time and effort. In effect, the poorest members of the council are those most out of pocket for participating. I took this issue to a VSO Bahaginan staff member, who reflected that

“One of the things I emphasise in my trainings is that volunteering is different in developing countries. Financial or material resources can be part of the enabling conditions for volunteering, particularly when it comes to supporting the poorest members of communities to participate ... In the Volunteering Act in the Philippines it says ‘where financial resources are not the primary incentive’ and I think this is carefully nuanced to this context actually.”

Staff, VSO Bahaginan

Finance also affects how much a volunteer can participate. As we saw with the international and national volunteers, not having budget to support community-level visits and activities limits what they can achieve (see more in the section above on “Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work”). When financial challenges persist, volunteers begin to question whether their work is really valued by VSO and CWMFMC.

Being invisible

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has seen examples in Bohol where the organised volunteering programmes are contingent on ‘pop-up volunteering’. We use this term to describe incidences where individuals spontaneously give their time, knowledge and skills (e.g. translation, agricultural knowledge, contact lists, event preparation) to fill resource gaps that surface unexpectedly in project designs. These efforts are not scheduled, supported or recognised by CWMFMC or VSO Bahaginan and yet they are central to realising change objectives. As one facilitator of local youth volunteering commented,

“No matter how much we plan there is always a loop hole in the logistics. Sustainability is with the community.”

Staff, BISU

Valuing Volunteering Philippines learned that effective volunteer contributions, and particularly their sustainability, are also dependent on complementary volunteer actions of people living in poverty. The fact that volunteering programmes can inspire local action, through the relationships people forge with one another (see the section above, “Volunteering is a social activity, contingent on relationships”), is a valuable contribution to the change process. It can be strengthened when the design of structured or formal volunteering programmes encompasses the creation of viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate.

A youth organiser working with local groups in the watershed explained how sustaining local action hinges on being able to express appreciation for efforts contributed and a sense of connection between volunteers.

“Enjoying is a reward. We realise in the UN time [when the organisation received support from the UN] we had a lot of funding. We provide snacks, funding.”

Valuing Volunteering: “But this is not the case now, so how did you redesign your approach?”

“So let’s start small and with those who are willing. As much as possible we bring our food and share. If they start with the expectation the organisation will provide snacks they will expect it every time It is more on what they can contribute to the organisation. We also emphasise their value. We make it clear it is about the organisation. It is about us. We say if you were not here we would not be able to accomplish what we have. We have incentives also. Certificates for graduation so they are recognised as active youth.”

There isn’t a good reason why volunteer efforts that fall outside of the structured volunteer programmes remain unsupported or invisible to CWMFMC or VSO Bahaginan. We think it just hasn’t been considered. When we consider how well-supported volunteering programmes result in tangible changes at the individual level (see below), overlooking volunteering at the grass roots is a missed opportunity to scale up change efforts for poverty reduction.

Good-quality volunteering experiences

Support roles are really valuable to volunteers, especially when they are facing challenges. There were months that long-term volunteers went without hearing from VSO Bahaginan and sometimes they lacked help securing basic provisions like their stipend on time or access to language classes.

ICS volunteers frequently mentioned how important locally positioned VSO programme supervisors and CWMFMC volunteer placement supervisors (VPSs) were to achieving their goals. Support was especially required at the beginning of placements. Most of the social network maps drawn by cycle 5 volunteers had programme supervisors positioned very centrally, especially in volunteers' first iteration. As they gained their own relationships and their lives took shape locally, the programme supervisors became more peripheral.

ICS volunteers also got a big boost when they received encouragement from their placement supervisors. We learned how the VPSs in Pilar LGU and BISU work consciously to create an environment where everyone feels they are working towards shared goals and volunteers feel trusted to make things happen. This created a win-win scenario because volunteers felt motivated and the VPSs get the best out of their volunteers for the remainder of the placement. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* witnessed two full cycles of ICS during its research in Carood watershed. We saw individuals grow from being quiet, shy and unsure of themselves to people who are self-assured and moving with purpose. The important thing is that these new-found capacities are not fleeting. By the end of the three-month programme they are grounded in a personal bank of experiences and relationships that they can use in future situations.

We explored how the ICS programme enabled this. We found the structure of the programme to be particularly geared towards volunteer development. It provided volunteers with all sorts of leadership opportunities from running workshops, or engaging Mayors and school Principals to solicit support for their cause, to organising community events. They were encouraged to practise using their own initiative, creating something from nothing. The development of this sense of self-direction was punctuated by individual supervisions, group reflection and team sessions to track progress, deal with challenges and discuss tensions that arise from cross-cultural working. These spaces act like a social infrastructure to support learning.

As excerpts of drawings from volunteers at the end of their placement show (see Photo set 4), the result is that volunteers' actions are not only fuelled by a sense of 'can do' but also by a self-awareness of their own biases and motivations, which they can use to overcome inertia or decreases in motivation when the change process behaves unpredictably. They write of "unlearning", of "realisation" of "how I can make a difference with my own way".

These volunteers had reached a point where they not only feel responsible but know themselves to be "response-able". From a social change perspective, these personal transformations are significant. A volunteering platform provides a safe environment to practise being an active citizen who can influence and learn from the change process. In the context of Carood watershed, it resulted in young people considering action on social or environmental concerns even when this requires them to change and challenge themselves.

"Our greatest achievement is that we are able to unite the young people in my community. Before, I was not interested in environment at all. I do not care. In my mind, I knew those things are important, but I never did anything about them until I became part of Basdio."

President of a youth group set up by ICS volunteers

"She reminded me of myself I had to tap my emotional quotient and step out of my comfort zone not just because I wanted to do some work but also developing, changing, learning are requisites to starting and forwarding change in the community As we work, interact and understand we become changed people too. We are variables in the change process."

ICS volunteer reflecting on the achievements of the youth group

These experiences are valuable in the context of development because the change process is rarely straightforward, direct or easy. It is not a sequence of technical problems that can be fixed one-by-one. Adaptive challenges are messy, complex and often overwhelming. The kind of 'reflexive autonomy' demonstrated by some volunteers is the same capacity that helps fisherman to change fishing practices to secure food sources even though it makes day-to-day life harder. It underpins a farmer's openness to try a different agricultural technique even though there are risks involved.

Photo set 4. Volunteer illustrations of their personal journeys of development



Distributing the benefits of participating in volunteering

The challenge in the Carood watershed is that the benefits of volunteering accrued within structured volunteering programmes like ICS are not similarly experienced by local volunteers. This results in an inequality of outcomes among actors in the volunteering ecosystem, with some developing as active citizens, some stagnating and others left to manage the burdens associated with their participation. In the context of youth volunteering, this created a gulf in the progress made by the youth volunteers in the ICS programme compared to volunteers in local youth groups. As a result, local youth groups sometimes really struggled to engage with ICS volunteers. Levels of shyness could be debilitating, making it difficult for local volunteers to speak or maintain eye contact. People reported feeling stunned by how beautiful people from Manila and other countries are. They reported not being able to understand sessions, so they didn't attend again. Young people will often say they are "bored" but this can be another way of inferring that "they cannot understand the whole thing". Another frequently used term is "lazy". It was used so often by young people to explain why they don't participate that *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* asked around to understand what people really mean by it. It can sometimes mean people are not interested but there is also a relationship between feeling lazy to do something and a lack of confidence, as this reflection from a previous Filipino ICS volunteer sums up:

"They do not believe in themselves to try. They are not interested to develop something. They think, 'this is just what I do, maybe I won't develop more skills'. Maybe they have tried something before and it has not succeeded ... they are afraid of failure and getting it wrong ... because people criticise ... they would rather not try ... I was scared on going to Manila thinking I can't do it. My mum encouraged me. Youth need encouragement."

Filipino ICS volunteer

There is an opportunity in the watershed to take better care of how volunteering supports local volunteers to personally develop as change agents.

"Personally I think we measure impact of volunteers by how a youth leader stepped up to mobilise young people and to share their voice in the community ... it could be an individual with leadership qualities being more than what they are, infecting peers to join them."

Staff, VSO Bahaginan

A systemic view of the support given by the ICS programme shows its potential to widen inequalities in capacities, rather than improve outcomes for the poorest stakeholders in the change process. The volunteering programme is effectively achieving the citizenship component of its objectives through the support it offers its volunteers but it is doing less well when it comes to reducing inequalities or supporting social changes that are pro-poor. Perhaps there are ways of building the volunteer support qualities of the ICS programme into the way it encourages ICS volunteers to work with local volunteers so they are also enabled to "do it themselves", "participate" and "take responsibility for something bigger than themselves".

Implications:

- There is an inequality in how the benefits and burdens associated with participating in volunteering are experienced.
- Volunteer support systems are important ingredients for volunteering that enables people to become self-assured and purposeful change agents.
- More attention needs to be given to structuring experiences to enable the development of capacities among the poorest actors in the system.

How learning systems help volunteering innovation and improvement



The introduction of volunteering programmes to Carood watershed is still relatively recent in its history. How is learning about its value as local change strategy taking place?

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 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.

Programme learning

There is no locally positioned learning mechanism to improve volunteering as lessons are learned. For example, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* did not find evidence of a monitoring and evaluation framework to track progress against the CWMFMC logic model. VSO has the ICS monitoring introduced by the ICS headquarters in the UK in July 2013 but it is not tied to the CWMFMC logic model and it creates perverse incentives, encouraging local actors to do the opposite of capacity building for asset reform and active citizenship, as outlined in VSO Bahaginan's in-country strategy (see more in the section above on "Integrating poverty and marginalisation issues into volunteer work"). There is an annual partnership review between CWMFMC and VSO Bahaginan but this is a single event in a year of volunteering activity. It doesn't create real-time learning that people can put directly to use. The other limitation of this review process is that it involves council members and volunteers but is not informed by community experiences, which makes it difficult to capture how volunteering has changed people's lives. There is little evidence that CWMFMC is experienced in participatory tools and processes to facilitate these sorts of community-level engagements even if it wanted to.

The one exception of iterative programme learning was the ICS initiative. This did show examples of informed decision making. We found examples where learning has led to new actions, opportunities and directions:

- The ICS programme has incorporated opportunities for income generation at Community Action Day events for youth groups, based on the finding that finance is a barrier for local youth groups to meet and run activities.
- There was good evidence that terminal reports were read by cycle 6 ICS volunteers (and possibly placement supervisors) and were used to plan livelihood activities to complement environmental action. For example, one placement in Alicia looked at basket making using locally available bamboo.
- A chance conversation with a politician in cycle 5 about integrating IEC into the curriculum has led to a pilot project where ICS volunteers work to develop lesson plans for teachers to implement.
- Guindulman LGU integrated a vermiculture project in volunteer engagement work with local schools to respond to the need for greater infrastructure on solid-waste management.

Adaptation is not all about continual change. Other opportunities have been maintained, including:

- Follow-up activity by ICS volunteers with the same youth groups
- Capacity building with the Union of Carood Youth Organisation (UCYO), with the eventual aim that young people will be represented on the CWMFMC.

In trying to understand what made it possible for the ICS programme to adapt and learn, *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* identified three important factors. Firstly, the locally based programme supervisors approached their work with a very reflexive learning style. They had a passion for the programme and for making it the best that it could be. They also encouraged this level of reflection among volunteers, creating safe environments to try things out, even if this meant the occasional false start. Secondly, the programme operates on three-month cycles with structured spaces for review. Volunteers have a mid-phase and end-phase review where they typically go on a retreat to reflect on volunteer outcomes and community outcomes. This is on top of one-on-one supervisions with volunteers. Local programme supervisors meet with all the VPSs in one session and all the host homes in another session at the end of the cycle to collect feedback. These regular review processes almost function as a continual monitoring process. Interestingly, this learning took place outside the monitoring and evaluation frameworks that were introduced.

The limitation is that the reviews focus more on the process of managing volunteers than the process of understanding how and why change is (not) happening. For example, placement descriptions are not typically informed or validated at the community level. This is where *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* could add value. Through the data we were collecting with participatory tools we were able to infuse programmatic thinking with community perspectives and locally grounded explanations of impact. We were able to share these insights with the ICS team at VSO head office in the UK and with VSO Bahaginan staff. But the most useful spaces for sharing were informal. We discussed findings and implications casually over lunch, dinner and even while swimming. This was reminiscent of how the two programme supervisors learned together.

Making decisions to stay on a course of action was relatively easy. The challenge of changing direction is making sure these decisions are understood and communicated to all stakeholders involved. Otherwise, it can lead to confusion and affect how communities view volunteering,

“The volunteers are changing so the project is also changing ... the first cycle were determined to go to school. The second cycle were not as determined to go to the school.”

Community member

In *Valuing Volunteering Philippines*’ experience alterations in programme design are more easily understood when all the stakeholders have been involved in generating the insights in the first place.

Volunteer learning

As part of the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project, 19 young people in cycle 5 were trained at the beginning of their placement in the use of ethnographically informed methods (e.g. storytelling), participatory approaches (e.g. multi-stakeholder storyboard activities) and systems thinking (e.g. systems mapping of local issues). They used the data generated from these techniques over the course of a three-month placement to support iterative learning about how to be effective in their work seeking to: raise awareness about local environmental issues; influence pro-environmental behaviour in communities to support management of a watershed; and build capacity for local youth action and engagement in decision-making bodies.

The training blended theory with practice so by the end of the three days volunteers had used all the tools they had learned about, which included:

- a storyboard to support people to create their own theory of change
- issues mapping to link stakeholders, themes, observations and questions
- social network mapping and multi-stakeholder perspectives
- how to identify needs, assets and local leaders
- the use of informal (*chika chika*) and formal spaces (interviews)
- storytelling
- skills for interviewing, translation, validation, documentation, and ethics.

The opportunity to look at volunteering as part of a wider social system initially prompted reflection on the limitations of volunteers’ own role and position. Some volunteers rewrote their placement descriptions. This opened up a whole-group discussion about what was achievable within three months, and what their focus should be given their desire to leave some sort of sustainable impact. The discussion was disconcerting, and at times uncomfortable. We were all fortunate that the Programme Supervisors were happy to ‘hold this space’. Rather than gloss over the disruption or offer solutions, they asked as many questions back as they received from the volunteers. This conversation resulted in some volunteers rewriting their placement descriptions over the ensuing week.

At a mid-phase reflection session we identified a range of different ways integration of systemic action research into day-to-day project work enabled volunteers to better tailor activities to community realities and adapt the focus of programme delivery. The volunteers gained more clarity about local barriers to change, what was realistic within time frames, and the importance of formal and informal relationships to making change happen. They used these insights to question the ICS programmatic theory of change and solicit greater community input into project ideas, which to their surprise sometimes countered advice they had been given by local government officials. Some specific examples include:

- a decision to align a Community Action Day with ongoing policy work at LGUs because it was considered more fruitful to harmonise ICS campaigning with pre-existing initiatives than to do something completely unrelated
- active engagement of community members in Guindulman market to seek local opinions about a local ordinance banning plastic bags
- a decision to drop plans to mobilise the community for International Water Day and reorient efforts elsewhere. Following a request from VSO to organise something, they sought advice from LGU staff who suggested a river clean-up. The volunteers visited the site and found the river clean. Next, they were advised to plant trees. They talked to local people and realised previous efforts on the part of volunteers to plant trees at the identified location had not succeeded because of persistent flooding
- new discoveries from conversations initiated by volunteers with locals in Ubay, which revealed a sideline industry in the sale of small reef fish for pig feed
- alignment of volunteer efforts to community priorities:

“We did the story board activity with the first youth group that we met in San Roque high school. We asked what they thought was the main problem in Mabini and they said waste management. After that we went into the community and asked them and they said waste management. So most people agreed it was waste management so we thought there is no point focusing on all the problems she [VPS] was asking us to do because it did not seem relevant to what they were talking about ... so that is how we came to working on waste management and coastal clean-up rather than anything.”
British ICS volunteer

At the end of the placement we asked volunteers to give anonymous feedback on the training they had received almost three months before. Over 85% thought it helped to make them more effective as volunteers and over 90% would recommend something similar to other volunteers. When asked to explain, volunteers reflected,

“It gave the whole team a clearer direction and a better understanding of our role as volunteers in Bohol, Philippines.”

ICS volunteer

“For the work we were doing it gave guidance and knowledge on how to establish the real issue.”

ICS volunteer

“It allowed us a means of gathering research which was pertinent in discovering the needs of the community, thus giving us areas of work to focus on.”

ICS volunteer

In their end-of-placement reports the volunteers gave numerous examples of how they had used the tools and techniques. In one or two cases, they had gone a step further in the participatory process and trained local youth groups in the techniques.

“They have got a lot from learning how to do research so they can better target their activities ... They are writing a case study on ‘what is your biggest achievement as a team?’ and they are going to do it on carrying out the research. The training gave them a real kick start ... If they did not have the training they wouldn’t have been able to do so much.”

Staff, VSO Bahaginan

The volunteers presented their research findings at CWMFMC, which has been one of the only times ICS volunteers have had a slot at council meetings. One of the VPSs asked to incorporate some of the materials into the in-country training of the next cycle of volunteers, reflecting that

“The GX [precursor to the ICS programme in VSO] had a component on the community development – about researching and putting the needs of the community first. But this info has been lost on memory stick. It is quite hard to get them [the volunteers] to think about this.”

Staff, VSO Bahaginan

Community learning

Communities can make decisions about how to use volunteer resources for their development if they are given space to reflect on their own development goals in relation to volunteer efforts. Following a conversation with a PO Chairperson about the organisation’s decision not to have ICS volunteers anymore, she reflected how with hindsight she could have tweaked how they made use of volunteers to focus on out-of-school youth, a priority concern for PO members. A *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* reflection session with Eskaya leaders in May 2013 prompted them to ask the next cycle of youth and long-term volunteers in August why they come and visit, and why nothing happens after their visits. Following an open discussion which Eskayan leaders instigated, it was decided the volunteers would (a) provide reports on visits, (b) write a short summary of Eskayan culture to give to the next volunteers to save leaders from repeating themselves and (c) arrange a meeting with the LGU about how volunteers could better support them. ICS volunteers used participatory techniques to help local youth groups gain clarity about their goals, objectives and time frames.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines’ action research inquiry with a local youth group has shown how it is possible through reflection and planning sessions to shift local perceptions of local leaders and ICS volunteers, from their being experts who call the shots to a view of them as resources that the community can make use of to further their aims (Aked J, *Bohol Action Research Inquiry 2014*).

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has learned that it is important to stop and ask the question ‘whose learning?’ If reflective tools and spaces are not made available to community members to think about volunteering as a tool for their development then it will always be something that is done to them. There is no rule book about how volunteering will affect people’s lives. The variables in every experience are too plentiful (e.g. personality of volunteers, past experiences and perceptions of community members, level of funding, activity level of local partners, natural disasters, political elections) to make cast-iron predictions on the links between interventions and outcomes. Learning spaces build capacity within and among people to translate insights into decisions about what to do and how to go about it. This is why learning systems, both formal and informal, are critical to development processes.

Implications:

- A reflection–learning–action approach could become part of the way CWMFMC and its volunteers work. The insights generated could support all stakeholders to make more confident decisions about natural resource management.
- Development organisations and their local partners need more regular feedback mechanisms in place than Annual Programme Reviews.
- Monitoring of volunteering interventions needs to be informed by community experiences and locally grounded data if they are to learn how and why change is happening.
- Learning spaces at different levels of the system (e.g. community, volunteer, programme) are important to improve decision making about how to use volunteering as a tool for community development.

5. Reflections on process

This section focuses on the process of carrying out systemic action research in Bohol, highlighting some of our own learning about using it as an approach to learning.

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 making research on impact relevant to people. Systemic action research requires careful facilitation of a positive learning culture to ensure it provides people with 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.

Some of our surprises and challenges:

Making research on impact relevant to people

In starting this project there was an expectation that everyone would be interested in learning about the difference their efforts are making to people's lives. The reality was quite different. People are so busy in the day-to-day responsibility of running volunteering and development initiatives, it can take quite a lot of persuasion to convince them to make the time to reflect. The momentum of the ICS programme was a case in point. Looking at the schedule ICS volunteers and the local programme staff were working towards was enough to make your head spin.

We were lucky to find locally placed VSO programme supervisors who were keen to understand impact and who became champions of the research to incoming volunteers. We were not always so fortunate in the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project to encounter staff willing or able to do this. It is also part of human nature to want answers, not questions. Communities, primed by historical styles of development in the Philippines which prioritise quick fix solutions over long-term support, wanted *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* to come with solutions,. They had to adjust when we explained we were there to learn from them. I am sure we disappointed some!

All this meant we had to work quite hard to make sessions relevant to programme objectives and community expectations. For example, we had to make a case to VSO Bahaginan head office to integrate the systemic action research training we carried out with ICS volunteers into one of their tasks to conduct a needs assessment of local youth organisations in the watershed. What we could offer the programme were the tools to fuse an assessment of need with ways of developing capacity locally but a three-day training slot was still a big ask from the ICS schedule. Sometimes our sessions with

communities ended up being dual function. Half of the time was spent on *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* and the other half was spent doing something fun or of value to them. For example, we wrote funding reports for POs, responded to requests to facilitate sessions and ran activities with the specific aim of helping a group to advance their thinking on some issue. Some of this activity was deemed instrumental to the wider *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project and some of it was done because the team wanted to express its appreciation to community members and help out people who became good friends.

Making the research relevant to VSO Bahaginan head office, VSO international and CWMFMC was challenging. We sent summary emails to VSO offices but they were sometimes met with silence. On one occasion a staff member wrote back with further questions, which we were able to incorporate into the research process. Generating spaces to feed learning into VSO Bahaginan was difficult because the same year they were experiencing a major restructure. We did take advantage of an international learning visit to have a detailed session with VSO programme staff, which was really valuable. Unfortunately, an earthquake disrupted the possibility of doing this with CWMFMC staff the same week.

Informal and formal feedback mechanisms

Some features of the systemic action research approach worked in our favour. Once people enter reflection spaces they generally find the process rewarding. The one-hour interview they had time for spills over into two hours or more. Validation and feedback were important tools for generating appetite for the learning we were generating. So long as we had permission from informants, we were able to move information and learning around the system. People were interested to learn about similar experiences or about developments in other areas of the watershed. We were able to report back on how their insights had been used by others. As much as possible we provided copies of written documentation with photos, so people felt their time was being put to use by the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project.

Some of the most valuable feedback mechanisms were informal conversations over lunch, over dinner, while swimming, mangrove planting, giant clam monitoring and at community farewells. Being strategically opportunistic about using spaces to share information was dependent on the lead researcher being present in the community to take up invites 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.

Importance of relationships

As a researcher in the *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* project my ability to continuously engage people feels largely founded on the quality of relationships I foster with them. I feel initial engagement is predicated on trust – either trust in me, or more commonly trust in my link person. And this means I have to work quite hard to make the initial interaction rewarding or relevant in some way to participants if I am looking for them to re-engage. I have tried to do this with open conversations at the beginning about the amount of time likely to be involved and why it is important that participants/partners get something they want from the engagement. As mentioned above, this can mean anything from running an additional team-building exercise at a meeting, to reimagining the focus of *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* to fit in with local interests.

The power to disrupt

Emergence is a key underpinning principle of systemic action research. As a facilitator this means you can never predict what direction a conversation, discussion or participatory session is going to take. The process of examining root causes and effects demands deep thinking and levels of critical reflection which people are not always used to. At times we would have to stop and do something else because people's heads were literally hurting! The process can dramatically reduce energy levels in a room, especially when people begin to challenge their own and others' assumptions. They can suddenly feel lost at sea, unsure of themselves and their actions. This is disconcerting and can leave them feeling disillusioned and unsure what to do with their learning. It was important to incorporate activities at the end of the session that focused on positives or charted next steps so people had concrete things to do as an outcome.

Sometimes evidence of disruption came much later, as with the Eskaya tribe. Three months later they challenged volunteers about their role in the community's development. We were fortunate people could see the value of this happening even though the discussion was quite uncomfortable for those involved.

Confidence

Having gone through the process of training people to use participatory approaches, we cannot emphasise enough the value of practice. VSO has a good handbook on participatory tools which is a useful reference guide but it is not the same as giving them a go. People can be quite unsure about approaching other people in the street or facilitating full community sessions. The group planning and reflection sessions that sat either side of practice 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.

It was still unnerving for people when community experiences and locally grounded insights went against what local officials or the programme thinks. The programme supervisors and *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* watched some of the ICS volunteers agonise over their decision to pull the plug on the World Water Day event. It was requested by VSO, so they felt a responsibility to deliver. They were surprised to have received such poor advice from local officials about how to spend their time. It was a big deal for them to use what they had learned to effectively say all the suggestions provided by people in positions of authority were inappropriate.

Young people are really good at systemic action research

Young people are very good at systemic thinking. The ICS volunteers were able to map out issues and connections based on their research really rapidly. It is impressive to watch. In *Valuing Volunteering Philippines'* experience, adults spend a lot of time worrying what to put where. By contrast, younger people are open to giving things a go, like participatory approaches. They are up for role playing and they are good at making sessions more creative and fun. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* worked exclusively with young people as co-facilitators in Bohol to conduct the research. They added a valuable dimension to the research process with their inputs into the design of activities to make them more fun, understandable or accessible. They were effective at explaining activities and comfortable holding the quiet, disconcerting spaces that usually follow while people figure out what we are asking them to do.

Working with local volunteers

Valuing Volunteering Philippines worked mainly with three volunteers in Bohol. Their engagement fluctuated depending on other commitments and availability. Two of them had been ICS volunteers in Bohol previously and one lived in Bohol but had been an ICS volunteer in Manila. *Valuing Volunteering Philippines* did think hard about whether the team could be truly impartial and enable people to speak freely if it included previous VSO volunteers. The reality was that the lead researcher was also a VSO volunteer so we had to deal with impartiality issues anyway. In addition, having volunteers on the team that had knowledge of VSO in country, the ICS programme in particular and the local context was really valuable. They were able to interpret local situations and comments more accurately. They still had relationships with people we wanted to meet. They also had historical knowledge about volunteering in Bohol. For example, one volunteer's involvement in ICS in Bohol almost a year earlier made it possible for her to identify where volunteer activities had been replicated in other municipalities. These sorts of insights would have been overlooked by the principal researcher.

The intensity of the approach

Systemic action research requires a lot of energy and flexibility on the part of the researchers. At the community level, we tried as much as possible to work round fishing, agricultural, school and fiesta schedules but the mix between my timescales, the community's timescales and the timescale of project staff proved a tricky one. We would go to great lengths to plan visits to justify the cost, knowing that all the plans would unravel on arrival as people cancelled commitments or natural events like typhoons and heavy rains prevented access to some areas of the watershed. We had to manage this uncertainty and calmly re-plan for the week ahead. To maximise time in the field, I usually worked seven days a week and had to attend community events or dinners on an evening.

Visits to Bohol varied in length from three days to three weeks. When I was in the community I was always 'on'. The need to be fun, charming and sociable every waking hour is surprisingly exhausting. This perhaps offers an insight into how local people feel interacting with 'outsider' volunteers as visitors in their place. During sessions, we usually had to improvise a lot. Instructions would get lost in translation, small sessions ended up large, or large sessions ended up small. Meetings generally started really late. We would always plan sessions, but often their success was reliant on adapting an approach and tools to suit the direction in which the community took the conversation. This is when experience in systemic action research becomes important. With enough practice you have a back pocket full of tried and tested techniques which you can apply very quickly to make use of insights and move thinking/action on.

6. Conclusion

The management of natural resources at appropriate ecological scales (like 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.

In this context we have documented the path dependency of organisational cultures, mindsets and behaviours and begun to tease out the ways international and local volunteers work to introduce and sustain new ways of doing things. 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.

VSO Bahaginan's use of volunteering as a tool for asset reform and active citizenship seems most suited to the governance and participation challenges facing local actors in Carood. However, moving towards these goals requires that VSO Bahaginan and the local partner, CWMFMC, direct their attention to organisational and programmatic processes as much as volunteer activity. Otherwise, they risk undermining the contribution of volunteers with their own practices.

Global theories of change like for the ICS programme find it difficult to capture how volunteers work in a particular context. They also are limited in their ability to provide insights about how to adapt programmes to respect and proactively contribute to local change priorities. The risk is that they go their own way, distracting resources from work areas that are more fundamental or relevant to alleviating poverty. The flexibility and confidence to iterate depends on locally grounded insights about what is (not) working and why.

Local strategic frameworks are not enough to guide volunteering for development efforts if they just list everything that needs doing in an area. Local partners should be generating their own theories of change about the order in which change needs to happen. This includes understanding when different kinds of volunteering can be put to strategic use.

Valuing Volunteering Philippines has demonstrated how it is possible to use participatory tools and systemic thinking at the volunteer and community level to help people understand the relationship between their own actions and the changes that result. Informing change initiatives with citizens' perspectives and explanations is an important step towards mainstreaming poverty and marginalisation issues into environmental work. It can make volunteer efforts more appropriate and provide meaningful and recognised avenues for communities to become active in their own development.

7. Key implications

This case study was designed to be a tool for learning rather than a comprehensive evaluation of the contribution volunteering makes to the sustainable development of communities in Carood watershed. This section identifies general implications for the wider volunteering, environment and development sectors based on the insights in this report. Suggestions are intended to be a starting point for further discussion and debate about volunteer-for-development programming, volunteer action and wider community participation.

1. Advance volunteer programme design

Implication

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.

Recommendations

- **The volunteering sector should conduct further research into the unintended impacts of volunteer programme design (e.g. geographical, financial, evaluation parameters) especially as they relate to poverty alleviation.**
- **Development organisations working through volunteers should explore ways of decoupling volunteer placement strategy from funding concerns to make volunteering a more responsive development tool.**
- **The development sector should consider opportunities to integrate volunteer placements into existing development programmes (e.g. led by government, NGO or private partners), especially when technical aspects of development (e.g. natural resource management) require a human touch to influence behaviours, mindsets and values among individuals, communities and organisations.**

- **Development organisations working through volunteers should explore the potential for positioning volunteering as a tool for ‘deep’ development with funders, which creates value through the provision of consistent relationships with communities living in poverty.**
- **Volunteering for development would be strengthened by the creation of viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate. This means actively supporting the capacity development of local volunteers as well as volunteers on structured programmes.**
- **Development organisations working through volunteers should develop systems that enable coordination and cooperation between volunteers working in the same geographical area.**

2. Reimagine volunteering as a social activity

Implication

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.

Recommendations

- Development organisations working through volunteers should equip volunteers with the tools to understand how to optimise social networks for change.
- Development organisations working through volunteers could try improving effectiveness by elevating the importance of relational skills in volunteer recruitment.
- Development organisations working through volunteers should explore how they can recruit to teams of local actors rather than stand-alone job descriptions.
- Volunteer jobs/placement descriptions should recognise the centrality of relationship building to volunteer effectiveness and motivation, expecting that some placement time will be spent interacting informally.

3. Make volunteer work accountable to the realities of poverty

Implication

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.

Recommendations

- Volunteer programmes should have greater appreciation of what volunteers can achieve as allies of poor and marginalised groups, and incorporate this into placement design. For example, more opportunities could be created for volunteers to work side-by-side with people living in poverty, even when they have organisational or institutional counterparts.
- Development organisations working through volunteers should review whether investment in language training is sufficient to enable effective communication between volunteers and communities. If this is not an option, provision of translators should be considered.
- Development organisations working through volunteers should consider the financial resources volunteers may need to meaningfully and regularly engage people living in poverty.
- The finding that community perceptions affect the trajectory of volunteer interventions should be acknowledged in programme expectations and integrated into volunteer support systems.
- There is a need to review the support volunteers require when operating in highly political terrains, especially when they are trying to directly influence power dynamics in favour of people living in poverty.
- Volunteer monitoring systems can make use of distance-travelled measures to capture incremental change in contexts where community receptiveness and capacity to engage is low.
- Innovation and learning in volunteering for development needs to be informed by community experiences and locally generated data about how and why change is happening.

4. Use volunteer placements as an opportunity to improve governance and participation

Implication

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 which 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.

Recommendations

- **Development organisations working through volunteers need to find a way of analysing governance practice (and not just policy) before making decisions about local partners to work with.** One potential indicator could be whether there is evidence of local partners using participatory tools to make meetings and decision-making forums accessible to poor and marginalised communities.
- **Development organisations working through volunteers should reflect on how their own engagements with local partners model ways of working that espouse different standards of democratic governance and participation, and not unintentionally undermine them.**
- **Local partners should be encouraged to conduct an internal exercise to reflect on barriers and opportunity areas for improving governance practices.**
- **Development organisations working through volunteers should review the processes they have in place to liaise with local partners and connected institutions that are undermining social change through poor governance practice.**
- **The sector should carry out more research to explore how volunteers can work creatively with existing governance structures and power dynamics.**

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

Implication

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 effects 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.

Recommendations

- **The volunteering sector should seek to improve literacy about volunteering for development by building local capacities to use volunteering as a resource for their own development.**
- **Volunteers are able to support greater understanding through their actions, but this happens over time and across placement cycles.**
- **When willingness on the part of the community to engage is low, volunteers should be supported to make sense of this reality and incorporate an analysis into their action plans or placement objectives.** Depending on the complexity of the barriers facing community members, this may mean a switch from a focus on project deliverables to creating an enabling environment for change to take place.
- **Another way of increasing understanding is to actively engage local community members in the design and review of volunteering placements.**

6. Reduce the inequality of benefits experienced through participation in volunteering

Implication

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.

Recommendations

- **Volunteering opportunities offer safe spaces for people to practise at making change happen. To maximise the development impact of volunteering, a focus on the personal development of volunteers needs to be balanced with a community focus so people in poverty also improve their capacities as change agents.** This includes recognising community-level action in volunteering for development plans, factoring in the difference it makes.
- **Development organisations working through volunteers should design systems to create viable, meaningful and celebrated avenues for local people to participate in volunteering for change.** For example, local volunteer efforts need to be properly financed by the sector, not just as duty of care to volunteers but as a route to nurturing local capacities for stewarding social and environmental change.

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Other outputs related to this case study

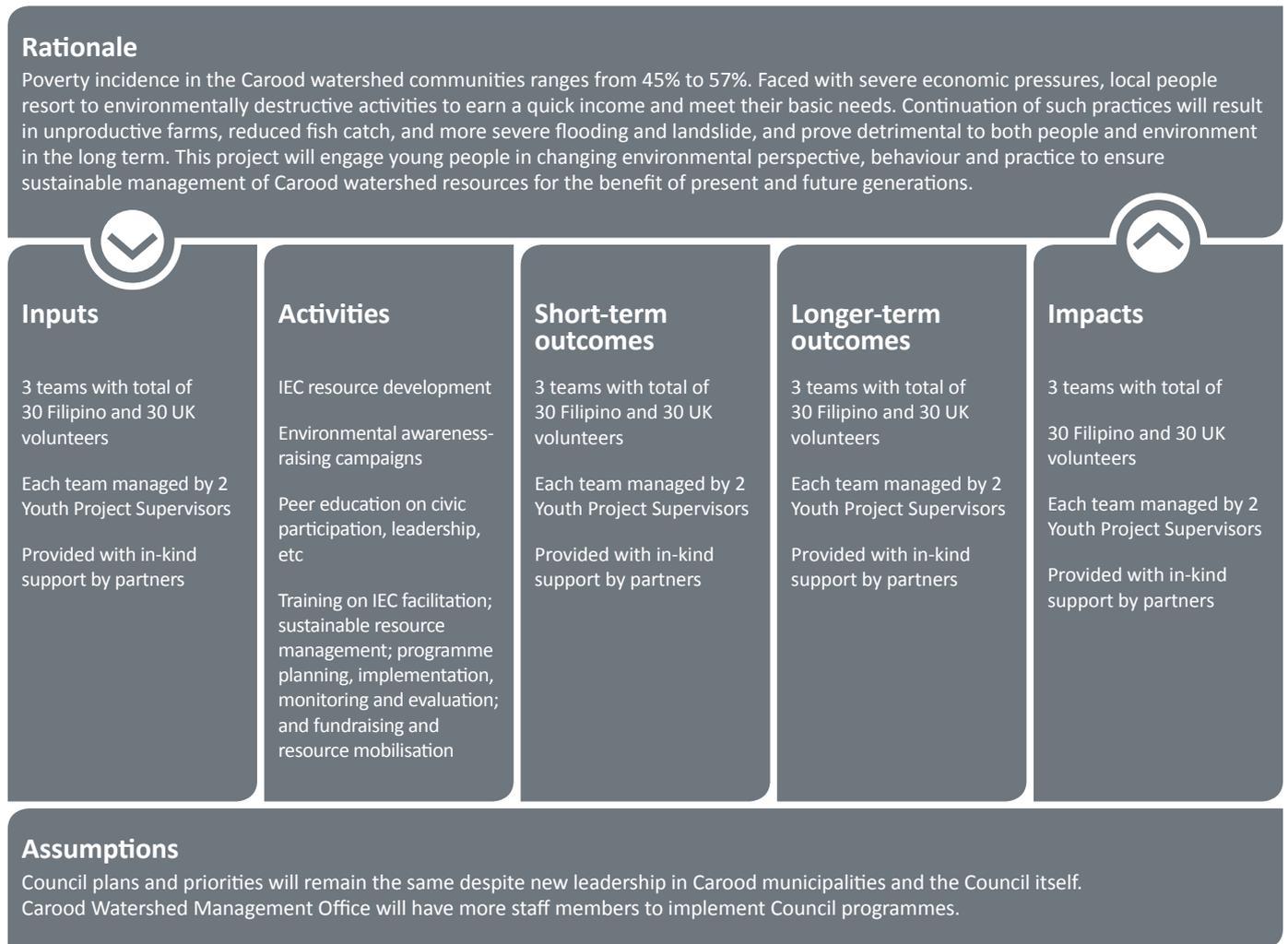
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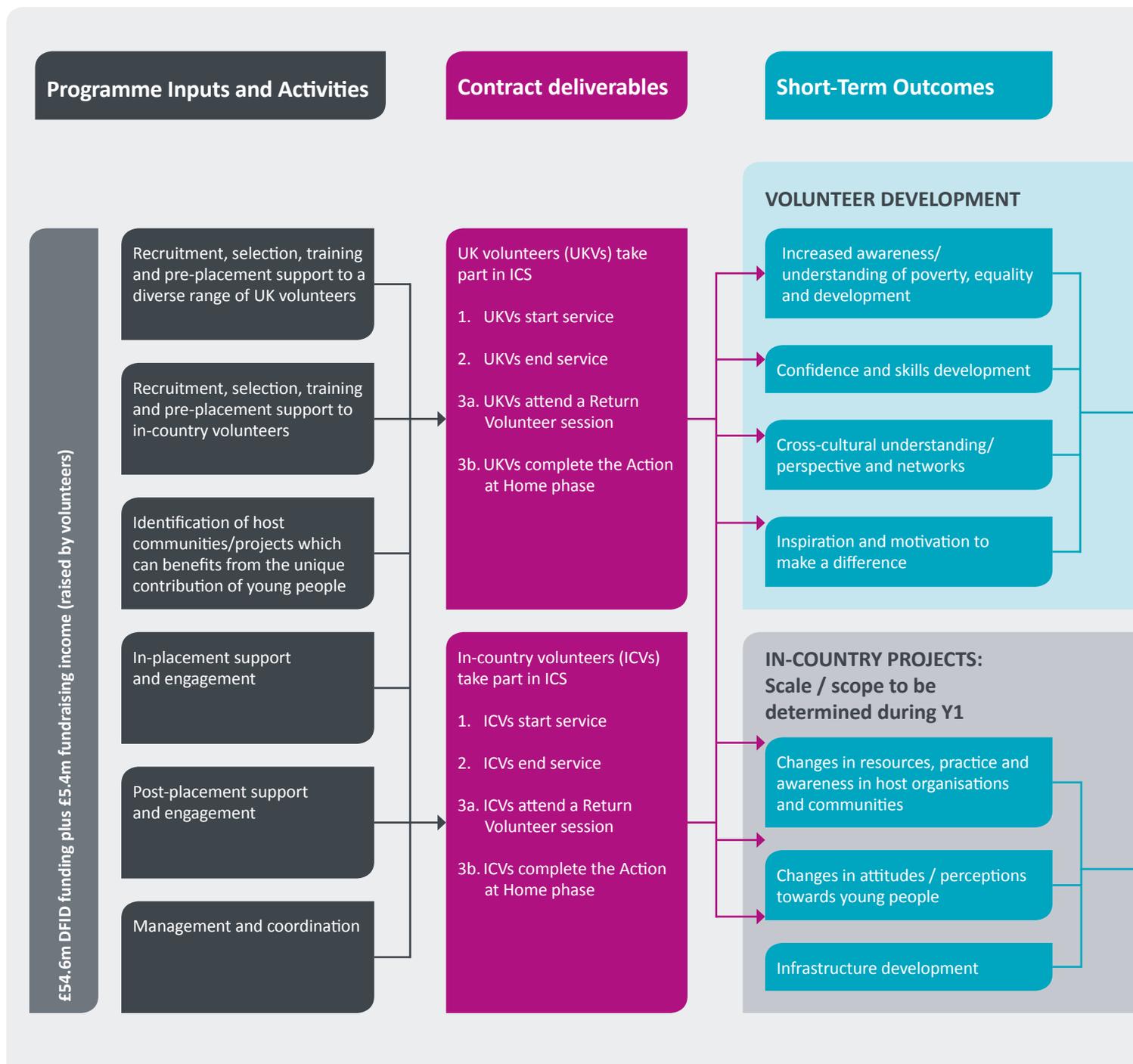
9. Appendices

1. Carood watershed log frame



2. ICS Theory of Change

Indicative Theory of Change for the ICS Programme



Longer-Term Outcomes

Impacts

Further volunteering and social action

Creation of advocates for international and community development

Personal responsibility and transformation

Progression to employment/ education/training

Behavioural and material changes in host organisations and communities spanning key sectors of activity

Host communities better able to support their own development

Increased active citizenship

Contributions to local development goals / objectives

Long-term economic, social & environmental development impacts (UK and overseas)

The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that every entry, no matter how small, should be recorded to ensure the integrity of the financial data. This includes not only sales and purchases but also expenses, income, and any other financial activities.

The second part of the document provides a detailed breakdown of the accounting process. It outlines the steps from recording transactions to the preparation of financial statements. This includes identifying the accounts affected by each transaction, debiting and crediting the appropriate accounts, and ensuring that the accounting equation remains balanced.

The third part of the document focuses on the analysis and interpretation of financial data. It discusses how to use the information recorded in the accounts to assess the company's financial health, identify trends, and make informed decisions. This involves comparing current performance with historical data and industry benchmarks.

The final part of the document concludes with a summary of the key principles of accounting and a reminder of the importance of honesty and accuracy in all financial reporting. It stresses that the primary goal of accounting is to provide a clear and truthful picture of the company's financial position.

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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She is a Doctoral Researcher with the Institute of Development Studies, exploring how interpersonal well-being influences the effectiveness of volunteering as a strategy for managing natural resources. She is Associate to the consulting arm of the New Economics Foundation (nef) and previously worked for nef's award-winning centre for well-being.

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