



IVCO 2018 RESOURCE PAPER

Active citizenship, civic engagement and global citizenship

Dervla King, Comhlámh

Introduction

The potential for volunteers to remain involved in action for development following an international placement has long been recognised, both by organisations involved in international volunteering and by volunteers themselves. The opportunity for individuals to go abroad, and to experience first hand many of the challenging and complex issues around poverty and injustice in the world, can be the inspiration for a deeper engagement in development. This is of relevance to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4.7, which highlights the importance of all learners acquiring knowledge and skills for the promotion of sustainable development, including through global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity. Returned volunteers have the potential to bring a critical, global perspective into local areas of work, study and daily life, and into the lives of others. They frequently have credibility in the eyes of their peers; with appropriate support and training post-return, they can utilise their experiences to make an on-going contribution as active citizens working to address global poverty and social exclusion (Comhlámh 2013, 2014).

Post-Return Engagement: Potential, Challenges and Enabling Factors

According to the findings of a large-scale study published by VSO in 2017, international volunteering increases levels of social action post-return. The study identified four levels of impact within post-placement outcomes: personal, community, within existing organisations and structures, and through the establishment of new initiatives. It found that South-South international volunteers were particularly active and involved in establishing new initiatives after their placement. Specific examples of post-return activity identified by all respondents included campaigning, supporting local charities, and undertaking grassroots community work. Additionally, a number of respondents talked about their role in influencing policy change, 'describing how their energy and enthusiasm for particular issues has been sparked or reignited by their placement, and how the knowledge gained has increased their levels of confidence and inspired them to take action' (Clark & Lewis 2017, p. 7).

A 2007 study of returned Cuso International volunteers found that Canadians who volunteered abroad tended to be active volunteers on return to Canada, and contributed more volunteer hours. Almost all of the interviewees and many survey respondents talked about how their international postings deepened their knowledge of international development and broadened their worldviews (Allum 2008, pp. 6-7). Additionally, a study conducted by FK Norway with 16 participants from the Global North and Global South found that 'an outcome for all of the participants [...] seems to be a sharpened social network and focused contributions towards a better and a more just world. [...] The participants engage themselves in order to provide and share knowledge within their communities' (Olsen Slagman et al 2005, p. 23).

This is corroborated by further data collated by FK Norway through its longitudinal electronic surveys with returned volunteers gathered between 2005-2017. According to these, 48% of returnees to Norway (North-South) and to the Global South (South-North and South-South volunteers) have been more active in civil society organisations since their return, with 31% stating that the FK exchange experience influenced this to a significant extent. A further 45% stated that it influenced them to some extent (Espe 2018, pp. 15-16).

Organisations involved in international volunteering have a critical role to play in nurturing and supporting this energy and enthusiasm for on-going engagement. In a report on emerging trends in international volunteering, Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) noted how such organisations are placing increasing emphasis on the ways in which volunteers apply their learning after their home placement, and the extent to which they share their insights with peers on their return (VOSESA 2013, p. 8). According to Lough and McBride (2013, p. 459), international volunteering is often perceived as one avenue for promoting cosmopolitan attitudes and identities, consistent with the concept of global citizenship. Volunteers may be challenged to evaluate their previously held beliefs and potentially exclusionary notions of citizenship, belonging and affiliation, and may gain an expanded sense of their responsibility to participate in social and political actions for global change. Lough and McBride stress, however, that ‘proximity and interaction with international “others” do not automatically lead to a heightened sense of global identity and affiliation. The structure of volunteer programs, volunteers’ motivations and other external factors may significantly affect outcomes’ (ibid, p. 460).

VOSESA also highlight the importance of focusing on how the volunteering experience can improve international volunteers’ understanding of global relationships and of the causes of persistent poverty and underdevelopment, noting that ‘this requires intentionality with regard to providing opportunities for reflection and learning throughout the placement and on the volunteer’s return’ (VOSESA 2013, p. 12). Comhlámh et al (2016, p. 5) echo this, with a call to organisations to support volunteers in the critical reflection aspects of the experiential learning cycle, which they view as a crucial aspect of the journey from international volunteering to active citizenship.

Research conducted with key stakeholders in Ireland and Poland (Comhlámh, 2014) identified a number of challenges facing sending agencies in relation to the continuous engagement of volunteers. These include: the busy lives of volunteers on their return; low organisational capacity and limited resources; a focus on the international phase of volunteer programs and neglect of the return phase; and a lack of structured programs on return. It indicated that the reasons volunteers choose to engage on their return are multiple and complex, but that there are conditions that can nurture and support engagement, such as: recognition (informal, formal and in career contexts); support from sending agencies; access to support services if needed (counselling, debriefing, coaching, etc.); and embedding development education and continuous engagement into wider volunteer programs that include informed

action on return and advocacy as major components. The findings were echoed in research conducted with 75 organisations across 17 European countries, on the basis of which twelve steps for fostering active citizenship among returned international volunteers were developed (Volunteering Matters et al 2016). These steps include: creating networks for returned volunteers; celebrating and recognising volunteers' contributions; mainstreaming of sustainable engagement from the outset; provision of post-deployment debriefing; long-term training and support post-return; and respecting volunteers' preferences regarding when they want to get engaged.

Active Citizenship, Civic Engagement and Global Citizenship

A brief review of literature and materials relating to the post-return phase of the volunteer lifecycle suggests that three main terms are used when discussing this stage. There are varying definitions of each, depending on the national context in which they are used, as well as how they are conceptualised by individual organisations.

A number of organisations involved in international volunteering have developed their own definition of the term **active citizenship**, reflecting its many dimensions.

- FOCSIV (Italy) defines it as 'the capacity of citizens to contribute (individually and associatively) to the common good of society (that is, contributing to social, cultural, political and economic sustainable development of communities), rejecting violence in all its forms. We refer in particular to structural violence, that is, all forms of discrimination, abuse, poverty and inequality existing in societies' (FOCSIV staff member, pers. comm., 11 July 2018).
- In their 'Valuing Volunteering' report, VSO and IDS state that 'active citizenship is often seen as synonymous with community volunteering, but the term is also used more broadly to mean any citizen becoming engaged with the process of change and development' (Burns et al 2015, p.21).
- Oxfam defines active citizenship in its internal glossary as follows: 'Poor and marginalised people gain control over their own lives by exercising their right to political participation, freedom of expression and information, freedom of assembly and access to justice. They have a say and are able to influence decision making that affects their lives, achieve their rights and challenge unequal power relations' (Oxfam staff member, pers. comm., 18 June 2018).
- As part of a collective project on active citizenship and international volunteering,

four EU-based organisations defined active citizenship as encompassing political engagement, social participation, and individual participation (Volunteering Matters et al 2016). They additionally championed adopting a critical approach to it, to encourage deeper, more structural engagement.

In Germany, the term **civic engagement** is more prominent than active citizenship and, although not a synonym, can be comparable. In general, civic engagement is based on individual or common actions that are voluntary, where citizens become active without financial benefit for themselves.

- The main objective of civic engagement in Germany is to improve the circumstances of individuals and of society, while also tackling environmental issues (Alscher et al 2009).
- The linkages between volunteering and civic engagement are also stressed by UNV (2015) in the State of the World's Volunteerism Report, which highlighted the need for governments to provide an enabling environment for civic engagement, with volunteerism being an important channel for this.

Finally, VOSESA (2013) has noted that the concept of **global citizenship** is becoming more prevalent within the discourse of international volunteering. This includes a suggestion that individuals should have a sense of responsibility, not only for their own communities, but also for raising awareness and participating in actions that promote the well being of communities and environments globally.

- According to VOSESA, 'the notion of global citizenship emerges from the recognition of the interconnectedness of countries and communities, and thus introduces the need for solidarity, recognising that actions in one space have consequences in other parts of the world, and that the struggles for social justice and addressing the global injustices of inequality, poverty and economic power are on-going' (2013, p. 24).
- The term is also used by the Portuguese organisation FEC, who define it in their Strategic Plan 2017-2021 as 'an awareness of the complexity of current issues, coupled with the exercise of active citizenship committed to driving change towards a fairer and more sustainable world' (2017, p. 35).
- In the USA, it has been defined by the Global Engagement Survey as 'a commitment to fundamental human dignity, couched in a critically reflective understanding of historic and contemporary systems of oppression, along with acknowledgment of positionality within those systems; it connects with values, reflection, and action. A critical global citizenship calls us all to humble, careful, and continuous effort to build a world that better acknowledges every individual's basic human dignity' (Pillard Reynolds 2017, p. 7).

Resources

Please note that these resources are, in general, developed for and aimed at returning North-South volunteers and their sending organisations.

For individual volunteers

AVI's *Volunteer Media and Communications Guide* was developed to assist current and returned volunteers to navigate the storytelling experience, and inspire them to find creative ways to share stories.

<https://www.australianvolunteers.com/returned-australian-volunteer-network/>

Uniterra Program¹ has developed a range of resources to support volunteers with communicating their experiences: these include guidelines on sharing experiences post-return; resources to support communication through photography, blogs, and storytelling; and a training video on media engagement.

<http://uniterra.ca/en/volunteer-space>

Comhlámh's *What Next: a toolkit for returned volunteers* is designed to guide returned volunteers through a process of reflection and next steps on continued engagement in development issues. It aims to deepen volunteers' understanding of the complexities of some of the issues experienced while abroad, so these can be integrated into life at home.

<https://issuu.com/comhlahmh/docs/what-next-toolkit>

Oxfam-Québec's *Guide de l'engagement au retour* (Returned volunteers' engagement guide) encourages volunteers to reflect on questions including: 'What type of engaged citizen am I?' 'What issues interest me?' and 'What are my personal objectives?'. It also covers topics including staying in touch with Oxfam-Québec, how to prepare to give testimonials in schools, how to recruit new volunteers, and how to answer difficult questions about international aid and cooperation.

https://oxfam.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/GuideEngagement_Fr.pdf

VSO Ireland provides all returning volunteers with a resettlement pack which includes information on settling back into life at home, advice on financial credits/entitlements, and suggestions on how to stay connected with VSO and the development sector. It also offers access to VSO's Learning Hub, which includes online supports on topics such as medical information, careers guidance, and debriefing. Copies are available by request from VSO Ireland: <https://www.vso.ie/>

¹ Joint initiative of World University Service of Canada (WUSC) and Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI).

INEX-SDA has developed an app called *IM-PROVE* which helps volunteers to translate the experience they acquired in their placement into 14 different competencies, and then helps them find new volunteering or professional challenges. Users are also encouraged to participate in local volunteering projects or to set up their own projects.

<http://improve.inexsda.cz/>

International Citizen Service (ICS) offers the *Action at Home* programme as a key part of its international volunteer opportunities for 18-25 year olds in the UK. This focuses on supporting returning volunteers to take part in at least one project that benefits their local community or seeks to bring about positive social change, within six months of their return from a placement.

<https://www.volunteerics.org/action-home>

Each of the organisations involved with ICS also provides support for the Action at Home stage. For example, **Raleigh International** has an A-Z guide to action at home, a key messaging guide to assist with communicating about international placements, a series of action guides, and regular awareness days.

<https://raleighinternational.org/stay-involved/ics-action-at-home/action-at-home-resources/>

Oxfam-Québec's Reentry Kit: A reinsertion and re-entry guide for our teams (Also available in French: *Trousse retour: Guide de réintégration et de réinsertion à l'intention de nos équipes*) is a resource aimed at people nearing the end of an international assignment and preparing to return home. It covers personal and professional preparation for return.

English: https://oxfam.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/ReentryKit_En.pdf

French: https://oxfam.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/TrousseRetour_Fr.pdf

Similarly, **Comhlámh's Coming Home Book** (8th edition, 2014) is a guide to returning home for international volunteers and development workers, covering the topics of reverse culture shock, health, job hunting, further studies and ongoing activism.

https://issuu.com/comhlahmh/docs/comhlahmh_coming_home_book_print

Weltwärts, the official German volunteer service program, includes the WinD network, which is organised by regional groups of returned volunteers from different sending organisations. Regional coordinators support WinD group projects and activities, with funding from the BMZ.

<https://www.engagement-global.de/rueckkehrende.html>

For organisations involved in international volunteering

Ten European VIOs received funding from CONCORD (the European Confederation of Relief and Development NGOs) in 2015 to produce a resource, *From Volunteers to Active Citizens*, that aims to build organisations' capacity to deepen volunteers' ongoing learning and engagement in international development. It focuses on helping volunteers to critically reflect on their learning, highlighting the importance of continual inquiry within this process.

https://issuu.com/comhlahm/docs/deep_manual_final_small_file

Comhlámh, finep, INEX-SDA and Volunteering Matters have produced a series of training materials for organisations, to support and promote their work with volunteers on continuous engagement in development issues. Funded by Erasmus+, these resources include *What Next? A training resource for working with returned volunteers*, which is a four stage manual that covers reflection on the international experience, how this is connected to global issues, practical skills for developing an action project on a topic relating to global justice issues, and consolidating the learning. The manual has been localised for each of the country contexts.

Generic manual: https://issuu.com/comhlahm/docs/comhlahm_what_next_dec-2017

UK version: <https://volonteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/UK-What-Next-manual-UK.pdf>

Ireland version: https://issuu.com/comhlahm/docs/what_next_ireland

Germany version: https://finep.org/media/methodenhandbuch_final_2017-06-23ls.pdf

Aimed at all volunteers returning from an international placement, **Comhlámh's** *Volunteering for the Future* online course is available at www.volunteeringforthefuture.com.

The project also produced a *Companion manual for working with returned development workers and volunteers*. This aims to assist trainers to explore considerations when planning and delivering activities to support continuous engagement. It also aims to support and nurture more critical pedagogy and practice.

https://issuu.com/comhlahm/docs/training_companion_final

FK Norway provides mandatory training for partners and participants in its professional program, including pre-return preparation intended to support volunteers' continued engagement in sustainable development. As well as encouraging participants to identify their personal and professional learning, and to address potential challenges relating to reintegration, the course helps them to identify how results from the exchange may contribute to the sustainable development goals, and how to communicate this on returning home.

<https://www.fredskorpset.no/en/intro-partners/courses-and-training/training-professional/>

A research report from **Volunteering Matters** on *Engaging returned volunteers in active citizenship* includes 12 recommendations for organisations on how to do this.

https://issuu.com/comhlahmh/docs/active-citizen-survey_final

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