

Final Report

IVSO 2002

**6th Annual Meeting of Heads of International Volunteer
Sending Organisations**



**Hosted by
Skillshare International
Saint George Hotel, Pretoria, South Africa
November 10 – 13, 2002**

Purpose of the meeting

- To enable the networking of Heads of International Volunteer Sending Agencies.
- To enable the discussion of key contemporary issues in volunteering and development.
- To provide opportunities for dialogue on good practice in international volunteering, including the use of visits to activities.
- To enable an interchange between the different global volunteering traditions.
- To provide encouragement and support to emergent volunteer programmes in southern Africa.

Conference activities

The conference opened on Sunday evening with a reception dinner attended by delegates, local partner organisations and Ian Basson, Director of Policy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Entertainment was provided by traditional dancers from Parktown High School¹. The end of the conference was marked by a performance from the Good Shepherd Drumming Group who are street children from Hillbrow in Johannesburg.

Following the conference many delegates took the opportunity to visit their programmes in the region. Some participated in study tours to Lesotho, visiting the Skillshare International (SKI) programme, and to Mozambique, visiting programmes of Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and SKI.

Welcome

Delegates from a range of volunteer sending agencies and partner organisations all over the world participated in the IVSO 2002 conference. The meeting commenced on Monday 10 November with a speech by the Minister of Social Development, Dr. Zola Skweyiya. The Minister acknowledged the contribution of volunteers in South Africa and recognised the value of volunteers in a range of fields including politics and advocacy, religious services, social services, culture and recreation, development and housing, health, the environment and education. A copy of his speech is attached. Following this presentation, delegates introduced themselves and their organisations.

¹ Further information is available from Jessica Lowe.

Session 1: New trends in volunteer sending agencies

Chair: Paul Beggan

Copies of the FORUM Trends Survey had been circulated prior to the meeting. This paper is attached as Appendix I. The paper was introduced by Paul Beggan, President of FORUM, and discussed in plenary session. It was acknowledged that although a wide range of organisations attended IVSO 2002, we all face similar issues and challenges in our work.

It was agreed that it would be useful to clarify the fundamental aims and purposes of our work and to ensure that there is a common understanding of key terms such as partnership. Delegates worked in four groups to discuss the topic "*Why International Volunteering?*" Ad de Raad, Oliver Mack, Tamira Lynskey and Karen Takacs reported back to the meeting as follows.

Feedback: Why International Volunteering?

- International volunteering is a tool for achieving our goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable development.
- Technical assistance.
- Contribution of returned volunteers to their communities: individual and societal change; increased awareness of cultural and development issues; educational value. The impact of returned volunteers currently requires further investment within all of our organisations. This requires a shift in thinking at several levels: organisational, governments, donors etc.
- Contribution to Millennium Development Goals.
- International volunteering can be used as a tool for developing links between communities and for strengthening partnerships (South-South, South-North, North-South).
- Local partnerships: To contribute towards development objectives of partner organisations and countries where volunteers are placed.
- Future: possibility of South-North volunteering as full mobilisation. Flexibility of volunteer sending to contribute to other goals in the future.
- Genuine reciprocity.
- Strengthening civil society.
- Volunteers may be able to speak on behalf of a national organisation not able to voice an issue themselves.

The following issues were identified as broad areas for further group discussion: advocacy, capacity development, civil peace service, local partnerships, partnership agreements, poverty reduction and private sector relationships. Groups looked at advocacy, capacity development, local partnerships and partnership agreements, providing the following feedback to the meeting:

Advocacy

Advocacy is sharing information. It means influencing society and changing public opinion in relation to the international solidarity and development agenda. Advocacy also includes policy and research work.

Several models were identified in which advocacy can occur, including through partner links or individual volunteers. The latter model is more nebulous when they return. Educational programmes are also used in many of our organisations. Advocacy occurs and can be strengthened through networks such as email. For example, this may include funding policy positions in our organisations, two year positions in community advocacy organisations and teaching posts in schools to increase the debate on development through curricula-pedagogy co-operation. The last two months of a two year placement could be used at home. Email connections between institutions in different countries may be used to increase dialogue and ensure information is up to date on issues. Communication can be made across the sector including areas such as education and environment. Mainstream discussions must include all sectors of society. Emphasis must be placed on whole countries/regions, not solely on capital cities.

Methods of communication include email between organisations, web sites, free media such as newsletters, local radio and press, our own magazines and joint work with others in their publications.

How can we do it differently? How do we know we are effective?

- Do we focus on breadth or depth of impact?
- Do we strengthen our own organisational voice or empower civil society/other voices?
- Do we add value or do different things based on our uniqueness?
- How do we use our ability to talk to all political sides?
- Do we aim for change or maintenance of government decisions?
- Do we strengthen individuals and organisations so public opinion is changed and governments listen?
- What are we in a unique position to voice?

The group discussed how we can work better together in this area. It was noted that we can translate each other's work and form electronic links through a joint net resource base. The group highlighted the importance of investing in returned volunteer programmes as advocacy is part of the volunteer experience and not an optional extra. The sharing of information on returned volunteers is also encouraged. Diversification of our instruments will enable us to remain flexible and proactive. We should also consider further the exchange of personnel between organisations and the importance of international advocacy.

Capacity development

- Whose capacity is being built? Governmental, institutional, individual, national level?
- UNDP debate: implications of changing paradigm; terminology; technical assistance to empowerment; implementation to facilitation.
- UNV response: voluntary activity depends on capacity and is a development concept in all its forms in different societies. International volunteering is one part

of this. There is also a need to recognise the specific values and attributes of volunteering.

- Volunteer organisations operating without volunteers.
- Measuring outcomes: methods, pressures and acceptable frameworks.
- Can we change donor perspective?

The group discussed whether capacity building is an individual contribution. If capacity building is at an individual level, skills quickly disappear. It is important to avoid a North-South transfer and replace this with southern development. It was also suggested that the service delivery model is a system of control whereas the partnership model relates to confidence, continuity and long term commitment.

Local partnerships

Key issues and challenges were identified as:

- Long term commitment to partners and countries.
- Process of selecting partners, volunteers and priorities.
- Tension between perspectives of strategic partner and of local partners (at partnership level and governance level).
- Need to control tensions between local and corporate agendas.

Equality

- Are sending agencies and partner organisations partners on equal terms?
- Decision-making: how do we really share power?
- Power levels in partnership: we need to consider flexibility in a particular situation. This should be at a macro level rather than focusing on detail.

Evaluation Process

- Monitoring and evaluation of relationships.
- How to evaluate partner empowerment through the partnership programme.

Partnership agreements

- We need to demonstrate the value of our contribution in an environment where governments want to maintain control.
- Service Delivery Model: we need to maintain control of our decisions and ensure that the government has a strategic role.
- We must take into consideration how governments respond to their own fears e.g. corruption.
- Government move to bi/multi-lateral funding. In order to remain relevant we need to maintain local experience.
- Continuity is vital to maintain our long term strategic view.
- If confidence in our funded partner is high, learning takes place. If confidence is low, disbursement is controlled.

Session 2: The relationship between national and international volunteering, Chair: Paul Beggan

FORUM commissioned work in Ghana, Uganda, Slovenia and the V4 countries, the papers for which are attached. Paul Beggan introduced the attached paper *Reflections on National and International Volunteering: Emerging Issues and Paradoxes* which highlights the emergence of three main trends.

It was acknowledged that there is a tendency to place a monetary value on volunteering, which is counter to the very nature of volunteerism. Volunteering is based on mutual self-help rather than carried out under strong economic conditions. Social development and mobilisation has a political element and neutrality itself is a political statement. We therefore face challenges associated with working in a politically sensitive environment.

The discussion following the introduction to this session raised the following points:

- The International Year of the Volunteer highlights the importance of national volunteering in both countries of the North and the South.
- The role of international organisations' involvement in national volunteering needs to be further examined and discussed.
- The global importance of volunteering was recognised and it was suggested that no argument in favour of it should be based on economic efficiency.
- The key foundation elements and core contributions required for making local volunteering work need to be identified.

Dr. Jurgen Wilhelm of the German Development Service (DED) presented a paper on the relationship between national and international volunteering within this session: *Promotion of the local civil society by the German Development Service (DED) – a review. Zambia was used as an example from the field.* A copy of this paper is attached.

The relationship between national and international volunteering was then discussed in plenary session. The group agreed that we must focus on what we can support rather than programmes we want to establish. Volunteerism should be seen as a tool to achieve our goals. While national volunteering may reduce cultural and linguistic challenges faced by volunteers, international volunteering enables a cultural exchange to be made and international links created. It was recognised that national volunteering requires an adaptation rather than imitation of the international model, as illustrated in the Zambian example. It was also acknowledged that international volunteering requires an entire change of lifestyle, national volunteering can more easily accommodate other commitments. It must therefore be recognised that both models have positive aspects and can operate concurrently.

Working groups discussed the following points:

- Is the relationship between national and international volunteering an important issue for IVSOs? Why?

All working groups agreed that the relationship between national and international volunteering is an important issue for us. Current trends of development contribute towards its significance and relevance. It is an important issue for us in order to support the local volunteer effort with the end developmental goal of sustainability

and self-sufficiency. There are two types of focus: stimulating local volunteerism and placing volunteers in development, which remains an important part of our work. We need to create a stronger link between national and international volunteering to ensure and maintain sustainable development. An identified benefit of domestic volunteer programmes was the reduction of cultural and linguistic challenges. The structure of volunteering is constantly changing: for example, there are national organisations using international volunteers etc. Capacity building is important and access to resources is essential to effectively implement the link between national and international volunteering. The importance of the relationship to our organisations depends on the level or scale of organisation and its volunteering programme.

- What are the implications for the way in which we operate?

The implications depend on the diversity of our own organisations and the countries with which we are co-operating. The capability of voluntary organisations in partner countries varies hugely. The diversity of the group brings a challenge to identify the links between national and international volunteering. Each organisation has a different experience.

- How do we prove the value of our work if we do not engage in national volunteering (in countries of both the North and South)?

Some organisations are already involved in these notions. In some cases, resources could place many more local than international volunteers. IVSOs should stimulate national volunteer programmes locally whether or not they are actually involved in it. Cultural imperialism must be avoided. We need to encourage the networking of international volunteers. IVSOs are in a position to provide training for national volunteers. There is a need to focus not only on sending volunteers but also to look at our objectives e.g. *what are we trying to achieve and how best can we achieve it?* We need to increase consultative work and evaluate ourselves in order to improve understanding of how we can work in each country. Funding should be used effectively to achieve goals rather than to send volunteers. Reference was made to partnerships and to working with national organisations and volunteers.

Summary of issues raised

All groups said that the relationship is an important issue for IVSOs, but the extent depends on the country, scale and level of operation. The issue is fundamental to our work and for development in general. There is not one definition of volunteerism, but plenty of material is available on terminology. The structures used in international volunteering must be adapted for national volunteering.

Session 3: Case studies

United Nations Volunteers (UNV): Ad de Raad

A copy of Ad de Raad's presentation is attached together with his paper on *UN Volunteers in Georgia* and the handout on *Reforming Technical Cooperation – the Role of Volunteerism*. A video was also shown to illustrate the experience of a UNV volunteer in Georgia. Experience and universality provide credibility for volunteers who have worked in other areas. It was highlighted that UNV benefits from the logo and reputation of the UN which enables the organisation to work in war zones and post-conflict regions. Neutrality is a very important aspect of this work and UNV is therefore well placed to carry out these projects.

Australian Volunteers International (AVI): Dimity Fifer

The East Timor Capacity Statement and Future Opportunities paper is attached. Dimity explained the commitment of AVI to recruit people with the right skills who work in the right way – working *with* people and living *amongst* them. Learning local languages contributes towards cultural understanding and links, which is strengthened further by sending East Timorese Australians to East Timor. However, it was highlighted that these volunteers experience mixed reactions from local communities in East Timor. The significance of mutual learning was raised in addition to the importance of working with other agencies. Dimity described volunteers' experiences, noting the significance of empowerment and the ability to find common ground. AVI has been involved in emergency response (short term volunteers) and has now moved to long term volunteers. AVI has been working with the Australian government to represent East Timor's views and interests.

Skillshare International (SKI) and Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse (SWAGAA): Luis Silva and Thobile Dlamini

A copy of Luis Silva's paper is attached: *A holistic approach to development and capacity building – A case study from Swaziland NGO sector*, together with the presentation and Thobile Dlamini's *Case Study of a Working and Successful Relationship*.

Luis introduced the history of Skillshare International and explained how the organisation works with partner organisations to identify their needs rather than carry out its own assessment. Thobile outlined SWAGAA's work and client base, describing the relationship with SKI. Youth outreach work and provision of information is particularly valuable and this relates to the challenges of working in a patriarchal society SWAGAA has experienced significant challenges with regard to capacity as the growth of the organisation has significantly exceeded the resources. SKI advised SWAGAA to consider how it could sustain itself capacity-wise. SWAGAA has now established a full-time staff base and developed a volunteer strategy. Rapid over-growth is particularly difficult to control in social issues, because staff do not feel able to turn away clients simply because capacity has been reached. The contribution of volunteers has been particularly valuable because it has expanded the capacity of the organisation. The partnership between SKI and SWAGAA has had a positive effect on both capacity building and visibility. However, SWAGAA also encourages

SKI to engage local governments and to involve the Swaziland country office more in pre-departure training of development workers.

Four groups looked at either Peace Building, Building Bridges, Capacity Building or held an open discussion to answer the following questions:

- What do we like about this experience?
- What can we learn and how will this change our practice?

Feedback from groups

Group 1: Peace Building

- Security of volunteers is managed by the UN umbrella.
- The placement worked in such a sensitive situation because of the credibility of the UN, combined with the more independent neutral view of the NGO involvement.
- A local partner with relevant knowledge and contacts would be essential in place of the UN umbrella.
- There are other areas where differing levels of conflict would allow volunteer support and intervention without such a significant umbrella.
- It is a challenge to identify a neutral NGO with whom to begin your work in a conflict situation. An IVSO can easily be labelled and identified by the organisation with which it first works.
- In post-conflict situations, human rights education is very important to help people understand the systems and processes available to them to support the reconciliation process.

Group 2: Building Bridges

What did we like?

- Connecting communities in Australia and East Timor.
- Long term commitment to country.
- What are the implications for us?
- Pro-active communication with ethnic communities.
- Strategic partnership with NGOs, government etc.
- Learning new ideas outside the traditional development aid route.

Group 3: Capacity Building and Local Partnership

- Links between southern and northern NGOs doing similar work.
- Regional and international exchanges and networks.
- Assistance with strategic planning and visioning exercises.
- Providing holistic support beyond the traditional volunteer placement role.

Group 4: Open Discussion

- Shared lessons of recruitment of volunteers.
- Whose agenda is being pursued in the partnership? How do we ensure that both can be followed?
- We need more feedback/exchange from our partners (and less from ourselves!)
- How do partners work with more than one IVSO? How could IVSOs work together?

Session 4: Snapshot of the South African Volunteering Sector and its relationship with the International Volunteering Sector

Bev Russell, Director of Social Surveys, and Mpumi Motho, who had also conducted research, presented a session focusing on the informal NGO sector in South Africa and its relationship with the international volunteering sector. Research was conducted in conjunction with the John Hopkins University. A video was also shown to illustrate the research and some of the projects involved in it. Bev's presentation is attached to this report: *The South African Comparative Non-Profit Sector Study – Summary of the most Relevant Findings*.

The session raised several issues from the perspective of this sector. Funding sources were seen as an issue within the sector as small informal organisations are not able to network with IVSOs and larger, formal NGOs. The South African voluntary sector has expressed an interest in sharing experiences with organisations from other countries. The research identified changes in the social and economic groups of volunteers as a result of changes in South Africa as a whole. These changes have led to the need to express appreciation in a different way and employ a new method of retaining volunteers, for example through benefits and meals. The relationship with the government is also important. An element of competition exists between the government and NGO sector in relation to staffing and funding. Many organisations find that volunteers leave unpaid placements with local NGOs and move to government projects. NGO directors and staff members also acquire skills within the sector and then move on, often to government posts.

In terms of the research, problems with methodology were uncovered. Methodology had to be adapted in order to take into consideration variations between different regions, socio-economic groups, language groups etc. Using a representation sample of every community type has proved to be a very effective method of research carried out sector by sector: networking within key sectors such as health and education.

Key points arising from plenary discussion

- Many issues raised during the course of IVSO 2002 have been reflected and highlighted in this session. The study appears to have produced some unexpected results.
- We need to examine how large IVSOs can support small informal NGOs.
- Merely sending a large number of specialist volunteers would not be successful as this would not match up with the local sector.
- The best answers would be obtained from the local, informal sector itself, rather than trying to find answers independently of these NGOs.
- Local NGOs want to share information with larger international organisations based in countries which have moved on from poverty alleviation at a domestic level. They want to increase networking and work together on how poverty alleviation and national programmes can best be adapted for SA.
- The mentoring role of larger organisations with smaller informal organisations could be a valuable experience.
- The relationships between some informal sector NGOs and volunteers raises an interesting issue as there is the perception amongst some organisations that international volunteers leads to government funds being released and a reduction in red tape.

FORUM meeting feedback: presentation by Paul Beggan

FORUM is currently experiencing a period of evolution. Although it has no office or HQ, a minimum structure is required in order to sustain and build work content and carry this forward to next year. Without an office, the organisation is able to retain freshness rather than get involved in discussions over procedure and the organisation itself. FORUM has a mission statement incorporated in the constitution and a web site (www.forum-ids.org). IVSO is the annual gathering of the members of FORUM and other relevant organisations. It was suggested that the IVSO conference and FORUM could be combined to form a single entity. An invitation was therefore extended to non-members to join the structure that is currently FORUM, although the option of a change in name was raised. It was clarified that the meeting is for Heads of IVSOs, although regional partner organisations could be invited to attend. Volunteers and partner organisations from the region would also be welcome to attend in order to present papers.

Paul Beggan stated current membership fees for organisations wishing to join FORUM and clarified that FORUM is registered in Belgium, allowing a bank account to operate there. Paul's term as President has come to an end and Cliff Allum has stepped in as the new FORUM President. Jake Bharier will remain in office as Honorary Treasurer until the end of 2002 and Karen Takacs has agreed to join the FORUM committee.

Future Meetings: Chaired by Jake Bharier

It was agreed that IVSO/FORUM meetings should be held annually and that mid-November seems to be the right time of the year. With regard to location, it was recognised that it is important to hold the meeting in the South as this enables partner organisations to attend. AVI and UNV offered to co-host IVSO 2003 in East Timor. The political implications of holding the conference in East Timor were raised. Raleigh International extended an offer to assist with research papers or case studies. Norway/Sweden was offered as a possible venue for 2004, to be hosted by Fredskorpset. Other offers for either 2003 or 2004 venues are welcome. Participating organisations are encouraged to contribute both intellectually and financially to future meetings/FORUM. Recommendations for the next IVSO meeting were made:

- To identify questions for group discussion prior to the sessions taking place
- To hold informal virtual discussion groups before the next meeting
- To use an external facilitator

Principal issues covered this year were trends, advocacy, national-international volunteering, actual experiences of projects, funding politics. Themes suggested for IVSO 2003 were:

- Advocacy
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- South-South co-operation
- Practical case studies, illustrating in-depth knowledge of different organisations and their challenges as an alternative to some research papers
- Responding to the needs of partner organisations
- Acknowledging different types of volunteering including *experts* versus young people as volunteers
- Repeat trends survey
- New and innovative practices

Acknowledgements

Skillshare International would like to thank Dr. Zola Skweyiya, Minister for Social Development and Ian Basson, Director of Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their time and input. We would also like to thank all delegates for their participation in the conference and related activities, partner organisations who contributed towards the conference programme and content and everyone else who was involved in preparing papers and presentations. The contribution of the administration team, Maria Adera, Rachel Nlanda and Carol Ward is much appreciated as are the efforts of our Public Relations Officer, Emma Judge, for ensuring that the IVSO conference received both regional and international coverage.

I look forward to working with you again in the future.

Jessica Lowe
Organisational Communications Officer
Skillshare International