

Making a World of Difference at Home and Abroad: Prosocial Activities and Aspirations of Returned International Volunteers

Rebecca Tiessen, University of Ottawa; Katelyn Cassin, University of Ottawa; and Benjamin J. Lough, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Paper presented at the ARNOVA Conference, San Diego, California, USA, November 21-24, 2019

Abstract

This paper documents the long-term impacts of international development volunteering (IDV) in relation to the prosocial behaviours, careers and community activities of returned international volunteers (RVs). We consider transformations arising from IDV opportunities that lead to prosocial priorities, including increased commitment to global assistance and changes in prosocial study or career choices focused on international and community development. Findings from a 2018 survey completed by 450 Canadian RVs show how IDV can contribute to global civic engagement, and more broadly, to building a more empathetic and justice-oriented society dedicated to addressing the causes and consequences of global poverty and inequality.

Introduction

International development volunteering (IDV) has a history dating back to the 1950s (Sobocinska, 2017). IDV is a specialized form of volunteering facilitated by not-for-profit international volunteer cooperation organizations (IVCOs) that offer humanitarian engagement by volunteers living and working in partner countries in the “Global South”ⁱ (see Chen, 2018; McLachlan, 2019; Schech, 2015). IDV programs are characterized by their focus on reciprocity in learning, capacity building, cross-cultural understanding and commitments to addressing the causes (rather than the symptoms) of partner community needs (Binns & McLachlan, 2018; Devereux, 2008). IDV is distinct from other forms of volunteering abroad, such as voluntourism, which are generally characterized by short-term (1-2 weeks) (Mostafanezhad, 2014) and for-profit program models (McGloin & Georgeou, 2015).

Typical goals of IDV programs include capacity development of hosting communities, the development of volunteers’ intercultural skills and civic engagement behaviors, and positive returns to the volunteers’ sending communities and to Canada. Yet, despite more than 60 years of IDV, the prosocial contributions of returned volunteers (RVs) to their local and global communities are largely unknown. To help fill this gap, this paper situates RVs’ experiences within broader scholarship on the intersection between IDV and global civic engagement, with a focus on the domestic engagement of international volunteers after returning to Canada.

From a policy perspective, IDV can play an important role in preparing a globally-engaged electorate that understands and supports Canada’s international initiatives and programs, is aware of global issues, and is capable of intercultural cooperation. RVs play a role as the “public faces of development ... in mediating connections between the ‘southern poor’, development organizations, and northern individuals” (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004, p. 661) and as activists

pressing for societal changes through their career and voluntary activities. The activities taken up by RVs tell an important story about prosocial global civic engagement resulting from the IDV experience.

We use the term ‘prosocial’ to describe behaviours and activities used to benefit others or to benefit society (locally and globally). Some examples include, career and study changes to better understand social inequalities and promote societal change; activism and advocacy for policy change; and volunteering with programs that contribute to the improved wellbeing of others in local communities and around the world. Broadly defined, prosocial behaviour entails “[i]nvolvement in and service to a community” with the intention of helping others or to have a “beneficial social impact” (Omoto and Snyder, 2009, p. 224). Developing a better understanding of programs that encourage prosocial behaviours enables governments and organizations to refine their efforts to foster such attitudes and actions in order to address societal challenges and achieve social goals (Stürmer and Snyder, 2009).

Global civic engagement generally refers to the attitudes, identities and actions of those who are committed to social justice and cross-cultural understanding. Global civic engagement – or global citizenship as it is often called – encompasses thin (passive or awareness-oriented practices) and thick (transformative, activist and change-oriented) engagements (Cameron, 2014). There are three qualities or themes that we ascribe to global civic engagement in this paper, which are exhibited by returned volunteers: intercultural relationship building (relational commitments); active engagement (behaviours and actions); and enduring commitments that are sustained over time (time and impact).

A Brief History of IDV

Volunteer-sending organizations around the world have been engaged in the practice of sending volunteers abroad for development work for many decades. One of the earliest documented examples, the United Kingdom-based Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), sent 16 British volunteers to teach English in Borneo in 1958. In the early 1960s, Canadian University Service Overseas (now Cuso International), Canadian Crossroads International, World University Service of Canada (WUSC), among others, created opportunities for Canadians to volunteer in the Global South. Global citizenship values were central to these early movements, with a focus on solidarity, social justice, democratic principles and poverty reduction (Lough, 2015). Many of the early participants in IDV returned to Canada and dedicated their lives to addressing poverty and inequality. Anecdotes abound of returned volunteers who founded new international organizations, joined existing organizations such as Oxfam, started solidarity movements in Canada to end colonial and apartheid practices around the world, or changed careers to research international issues or engage in public service work focused on international development issues (see Compton Brouwer, 2013; Glass, 2015). As stories and anecdotes, these reports tell us little about the broader trends and impacts of IDV on the now large number of Canadians who have participated in IDV. Since 1960, the Canadian Partnership Branch – housed originally under the Canadian International Development Agency – sent approximately 67,500 volunteers abroad with a commitment to sending more than 11,000 more volunteers abroad between 2015 and 2020 through the Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP) (Laywine, 2017; GAC, 2019).

The Government of Canada's VCP was initially administered by the Canadian International Development Association (CIDA) in order to engage Canadian civil society in global assistance work (Universalia et al, 2005). Despite limited resources and the sometimes-limited capabilities of volunteers, partner organizations routinely provide positive assessments of volunteer performance and contributions (ibid.). The vision behind CIDA's VCP was to foster "the development of social networks for change (or social capital), both in Canada and around the world, mobilizing support for and action in regards to, common global concerns" (Universalia et al, 2005, p. 4). The VCP offers the potential to expand opportunities for engaging Canadians in global and international development issues. RVs can be champions for global development assistance, sharing insights and information through public engagement and fundraising efforts, thereby contributing to global civic engagement efforts.

To date, research on Canadian RVs can be found in a small number of studies focusing on professional and lifestyle changes for returned volunteers, such as enhanced civic engagement, social activism, and cross-cultural understanding (Kelly & Case, 2007; Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Universalia et al, 2005). Published studies, however, have yet to sufficiently demonstrate if global civic engagement has materialized among RVs and if it endures over the long-term. This study aims to fill this gap by retrospectively assessing continued engagement by Canadian RVs in prosocial activities and behaviours.

Evidence of Returned Volunteers' Impacts on Their Home Communities

Existing research on international volunteering suggests that these experiences have lifelong prosocial impacts, noting that many RVs remain active in their communities or in international development work long after returning home. For example, Kelly and Case (2007) report that 67% of RVs indicated that their volunteer experience contributed to philanthropic career paths and repeated stints of volunteering. Further, 60% of RV survey respondents in a 2005 Universalia study reported staying involved in community or service groups related to international development work. Of the Canadians who volunteered abroad, 58% of the female participants and 37% of the male participants believed that the international volunteer experience had a direct impact on their career goals (Universalia et al, 2005). In addition, 46% of returned volunteers said their future career decisions had been affected by their overseas experience (ibid.). In another study, when participants were asked if current employment was related to work conducted while overseas on international volunteering placements, 47% of the respondents said yes (Tiessen and Heron, 2012). For many RVs, the overseas experience was important for testing a career choice (Tiessen, 2014).

As scholarly research in international volunteering has pointed out, studies on the impacts of RVs must take into consideration the range of program modalities, as well as preparation and engagement strategies undertaken by different volunteer sending organizations (Sherraden, Lough & McBride, 2008). The research by Kelly and Case (2007), Tiessen and Heron (2012) and Tiessen (2018) were all conducted with Canadian-specific samples. The latter two studies were based on fairly small windows of longitudinal analysis (generally within six months to a year upon return) and had a specific focus on certain program modalities, such as medium-term (3-6 month) placements. The study by Kelly and Case (2007) was focused on a particular

organization and the specific commitments made by volunteers from one program serving 24 months or longer. The diversity of programs taken up by Canadians calls for a more comprehensive analysis of the suite of options available to international volunteers, in order to assess these experiences in relation to prosocial behaviours.

In their 2013 study, Fee and Gray address the unique learning outcomes among Australian international development volunteers. Their research demonstrated that “expatriates experienced learning outcomes that were more frequently transformational” in comparison to a control group working domestically (p. 196). Transformational learning is not incremental like “most learning”, and causes the individual to question their assumptions, adopt new perspectives and alter their values (Fee and Gray, 2013, p. 198). Of particular import are what Archer (1986) calls ‘cultural bumps’, or the day-to-day cross-cultural experiences of international volunteers, which can have significant impacts on learning outcomes. In one longitudinal study of international volunteering, Starr (1994) demonstrates that experiences abroad constitute “turning points” for volunteers, generating “critical changes” and “new beginnings” (p. 137) that may translate into prosocial behaviours. Such prosocial behaviours can include changes to career and study paths, as well as more values-oriented effects, such as the prioritization of, and engagement in, global assistance.

Building on the small body of extant research on changes to RVs’ attitudes and behaviours, the present study analyzes survey responses provided by 450 Canadian returned international volunteers. Using multiple linear regression analyses and an open-coding protocol of qualitative data, we demonstrate that participants who rated their volunteer time abroad as a “transformational experience” were more likely to prioritize or provide global assistance and to make prosocial study or career choices, thus exhibiting enhanced global civic engagement.

Methods

Survey development: Researchers developed a survey to measure RVs volunteering and giving behaviours after returning to Canada. The survey questions were designed to measure the perceived impacts of the international volunteer experience on a variety of attitudes and behaviours. The survey instrument was developed in both French and English, with bilingual back-translation to ensure a similar meaning of survey questions in both languages.

Recruitment: Survey participants were recruited through close collaboration with 12 of the VCP-affiliated international volunteer cooperation organizations (IVCOs) to access potential participants. Between January and August 2018, these IVCOs were contacted with information about the study and given opportunities to provide feedback on the strategies for reaching returned international volunteers; to provide feedback on the draft survey questions; and to give insights into the potential value and impact of the proposed research. To facilitate updates to the IVCOs’ RV databases, researchers offered support to all participating IVCOs and, in three instances, visited their headquarters to access RV databases and to update contact information.

Data collection: The final survey was sent to more than 45 volunteer sending organizations and IVCOs in September 2018 with a note including instructions for how to distribute the information about the survey to their respective RV lists. Links to the survey website were also provided in this communication. All communication material was provided in French and

English. Information about the survey was also communicated through social media including email listservs, *Twitter* and *Facebook*. In total, 450 valid responses were received. Social media links to the survey were open access, and thus the final response rate is unknown. Descriptive statistics of the survey respondents are summarized in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1]

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Survey Respondents

Category	Frequency (n)	Percent
Biological sex		
Male	114	36.2%
Female	200	63.5%
Other / prefer not to answer	1	0.3%
Ethnicity		
White	248	79.0%
Black	21	6.7%
Asian	19	6.1
Pacific Islands	1	0.3%
Hispanic	8	2.6%
Aboriginal	7	2.2%
Other	10	3.2%
Marital status		
Married or common law	168	55.6%
Single, never married	97	32.1%
Separated or divorced	35	11.6%
Widow or widower	2	0.7%
Education completed		
Graduated from high school, equivalent or less	12	6.1%
Pre-university degree (college-level training)	19	6.1%
Bachelor's degree	78	24.9%
University certificate/diploma, degree > Bachelor's level	197	62.9%
Continuous variables		
	Mean	sd
Total weeks travelled abroad	188.2	280.7
Total number of times travelled internationally	32.9	66.0
Age	44.1	14.1
Personal income (CAD, recoded)	\$59,000	\$37,000
Household income (CAD, recoded)	\$85,000	\$47,000

Quantitative analysis

Two separate multiple linear regression analyses were regressed on each of two dependent variables (i.e. global assistance and philanthropic career changes). These composite variables were developed using principal component analyses (PCA) as data reduction processes. The two dependent variables are composites of three or four discrete survey questions – each question using a 5-point Likert-type answer set. The acceptability threshold for component loadings was

set at $\lambda = 60$. Compositive variables were also tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha reliability analyses, with a reliability threshold of $\alpha = .70$. The value of the composite variables is the average of all component questions, where at least three valid (i.e. non-missing) questions were required for each average score. (See Table 2).

Table 2: Principal Component and Reliability Analyses

Composite variable and indicators	α^{**}	$\bar{x}$	sd	A^*
<i>Philanthropic Career Changes</i>	0.86	3.6	1.27	
As a direct result of my international volunteer experience, I decided to pursue a field of study related to social or economic development.				.882
As a direct result of my international volunteer experience, I decided to pursue a career related to social or economic development.				.929
It encouraged me to make career changes that focused more on helping others.				.833
<i>Global Assistance</i>^ψ	0.74	3.7	0.96	
As a direct result of my international volunteer experience, I am more involved with international humanitarian or development projects.				.756
After volunteering abroad, helping people in other countries became a higher priority in my life.				.807
I am an advocate for increasing Canada's foreign aid spending.				.734
I contribute more money to international organizations now than I did before volunteering abroad.				.711

*Acceptability threshold of λ set at .60, **Threshold of $\alpha = .70$, ^ψ At least three valid indicators required

Independent variables: Regression analyses included five independent variables namely: (1) duration (in weeks) of volunteer service for the main organization; (2) a log10 transformation (due to unacceptably high skew and kurtosis) of the total number of past volunteer experiences outside of Canada; (3) group status, where 0 = in a group of 2 or more volunteers, 1 = individual placement; (4) placement purpose, where 0 = skills transfer or capacity development, 1 = to enhance cross-cultural understanding; "other" purposes ($n = 34$) were recoded into one of these two categories based on the qualitative interpretation of response; (5) a five-point Likert-type scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree) responding to the prompt: "volunteering abroad was a 'transformational experience' (one that resulted in significant changes in my life that probably would not have occurred if I had not participated in volunteering)."

Control variables: Regression analyses also included five control variables namely: (1) sex at birth, where 1 = male, 0 = female; one case of "prefer not to answer" was coded as missing; (2) age in years; (3) education, where 0 = Bachelor's level degree or lower, 1 = university certificate or diploma or a degree above the Bachelor's level; because respondents were highly educated, binary recoding was performed to capture this variance; (4) political views, where 0 = middle to right, 1 = left; recoded with this split due to a high number of left-leaning views, and (5) religiosity, where 0 = no religious attendance in past year, 1 = religious attendance at least once in past year; recoded to capture meaningful variance.

Qualitative data analysis

Participant responses to 10 open-ended questions were analysed using content analysis. Three of the ten questions were descriptive of the IVCOs and the location of the placement. The other seven questions were qualitatively analyzed by establishing thematic categories based on an open-coding protocol. Reoccurring themes and comments were grouped and adjusted iteratively as analysis progressed. Responses to each open-ended question were then tallied in order to articulate the prevalence of themes. Particularly relevant, descriptive or informative quotations from participants were subsequently highlighted and extracted in order to illuminate findings from the study. In total, 1137 open-ended responses were analyzed.

Findings

Results from this study are presented in two discrete sections. The first section reports on findings from multivariate analysis of the survey data, separated by three main outcome areas, namely: (1) the general satisfaction of volunteers and transformational changes to the RVs' perspectives as a result of their experience; (2) RVs' prioritization of global assistance; and (3) philanthropic career changes made by RVs'. The second section reports on various outcomes emerging from univariate analyses and open-ended survey responses. These outcomes delve deeper into RVs' prosocial behaviors by investigating: involvement in international humanitarian and development projects; degree of helping people abroad directly; advocacy for increasing foreign aid spending; financial contributions to international organizations; engagement with locally-based prosocial activities; pursuing studies and careers related to social and economic development; and other career changes focused on helping others. In a few cases, univariate summaries of discrete survey questions are included in this section to support the qualitative and quantitative linkages within outcomes.

Findings from Multivariate Analysis

General satisfaction and transformational shifts: Overall, respondents to the survey were quite satisfied with their international volunteer experience. On a scale of 1-10, where 10 equals highly satisfied, the average rating across respondents (aggregated across up to three IVCOs) was 8.11. Although this statistic is not a result from multivariate analysis, it provides important background for this section given generally positive correlations between organizational satisfaction and perceived personal changes. Survey respondents were also asked to rate the degree to which international volunteering with the IVCO was a "transformational experience" (measured as an experience that resulted in significant changes in their life that probably would not have occurred if they had not participated in volunteering). Nearly 77% of respondents agreed (including 58% who strongly agreed) with this statement.

Prioritization of global assistance: Respondents who were more likely to rate their volunteer time abroad as a "transformational experience" were also far more likely to prioritize or provide global assistance ($t = 6.79$, $df = 221$, $p < .001$) controlling for other variables in the model. For control variables, older volunteers ($t = 2.37$, $p < .05$) with a higher education ($t = 2.15$, $p < .05$) and higher religiosity ($t = 2.39$, $p < .05$) were also more likely to prioritize or provide global assistance.

Philanthropic career changes: Respondents who were more likely to rate their volunteer time abroad as transformational were also far more likely to make prosocial study or career choices focused on helping others ($t = 6.79$, $df = 221$, $p < .001$) controlling for other variables in the model. For control variables, volunteers with a higher education ($t = 2.11$, $p < .05$) were also more likely to make prosocial study or career choices focused on helping others. On the whole, about 6 out of 10 respondents believed that, as a direct result of their international volunteer experience, they made philanthropic changes to their studies or careers (i.e. they pursued a study or career direction related to social or economic development or helping others). Results of the quantitative analysis are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Results of Multivariate Regression Analyses on RVs' Prosocial Behaviors

	Global Assistance ($n = 221$)					Philanthropic Career ($n = 196$)				
	B	SE	β	t	p	B	SE	β	t	p
(Constant)	1.36	.31		4.43	.000	1.89	.44		4.34	.000
Times volunteered (lg10)	.18	.19	.06	.91	.365	.21	.28	.05	.74	.459
Duration (weeks)	.00	.00	.02	.30	.763	.00	.00	.12	1.77	.079
X-cultural mission	-.09	.14	- .05	-.65	.519	.06	.20	.03	.33	.745
Solo experience	.17	.13	.09	1.31	.192	.02	.18	.01	.09	.929
Transformational	.33**	.05	.41	6.79	.000	.44*	.07	.41	6.21	.000
Sex (male)	.04	.12	.02	.33	.738	-.14	.17	- .06	-.84	.405
Age	.01*	.00	.15	2.37	.019	-.01	.01	- .12	- 1.75	.082
Education (> Bachelor)	.25*	.12	.13	2.15	.033	.36*	.17	.14	2.11	.037
Political views (left)	.18	.13	.08	1.38	.170	-.13	.19	- .05	-.67	.502
Religious (some)	.27*	.11	.14	2.39	.018	.30	.16	.12	1.88	.062

Univariate and Qualitative Findings

Global assistance: Consistent with results from the multivariate analysis, open-ended responses contained a variety of indicators that suggest a higher prioritization of global assistance after an international volunteering experience. For example, in response to the question “In what ways was your life changed by your international volunteer experience?” 19% of respondents expressed an enhanced awareness and understanding of social and economic development issues and 2% were inspired to look inward to domestic issues, developing an enhanced political awareness.

Other indicators of a higher prioritization of global assistance linked to cross-cultural connections included, 10% of participants who indicated they had developed enhanced cross-cultural communication skills; 6% who felt that they had increased empathy and openness as a result of volunteering internationally; and 84% who said they now have more friends, acquaintances and contacts who live in other countries. Further, 2% indicated they had gained skills in social justice and ethics. Though enhanced awareness, openness, and cross-cultural

communication are not direct indicators of increased action, they are suggestive of heightened engagement, ongoing interest and importantly, they represent a higher priority given to global assistance by RVs.

Involvement in international humanitarian and development projects: Around 65% of respondents agreed that they became more involved with international humanitarian or development projects after volunteering abroad. Survey responses pertaining to volunteering behaviours upon return to Canada showed that most RVs volunteered for organizations with an exclusively domestic focus (60%), while 27% focused on both domestic and international issues, and 13% were exclusively or mostly focused on international issues.

Respondents were asked if they would like to say more about why their interest in volunteering in Canada had changed after volunteering abroad. Nearly one in five respondents (17%) expressed a motivation to continue in such work, feeling that their time abroad “humanized” the problems and needs in developing countries, generating heightened compassion, awareness, and motivation to contribute. As one RV expressed, the IDV experience put them “much more in tune [with] and aware of the plight of people around the world.” The RV used the language of compassion and empathy to explain how he/she felt about his/her prosocial contributions. This empathy is underscored by his/her reflections on how locally based situations in Canada “can easily transport me back overseas to individuals I met and the situations they face.” The impact of this empathy and reflection is a sense of duty or responsibility to act on this knowledge and “to build awareness amongst people here about the realities that people face overseas.”

Responses such as these more firmly established the correlation of enhanced awareness and openness with increased action and prioritization of global assistance. For some respondents, the volunteer experience augmented their awareness of needs abroad, resulting in ongoing commitments to international assistance. Among returned international volunteers, 38% reported providing technical or financial support to at least one host community or organization abroad within the past year. Removing the 18% of most recently returned volunteers from the analysis (who finished their volunteer placement after 2017) unexpectedly increased this rate of assistance (to 43%). Therefore, more than two-fifths of returned volunteers continued to aid or support the host community or organization, even after having returned to Canada for 18 months or more.

Several participants identified additional commitments to both global and local prosocial efforts. One survey participant said: “[I] have been a board member on the working board for a struggling non-profit in Canada while also continuing to provide volunteer support to another organization back in the Caribbean where I volunteered when overseas.” Another participant said they were slightly more disengaged from locally based volunteer work, focusing more on international work. IDV can therefore have a direct and enduring impact on the degree to which RVs prioritize and contribute to international humanitarian and development projects upon their return.

Higher prioritization of helping others abroad: Around 65% of respondents agreed that helping people in other countries became a higher priority in their lives after volunteering abroad. We provide several examples below to consider the ongoing interest in globally focused prosocial

behaviours of RVs. For some of the participants, their ongoing engagement in international work involved volunteer work, sometimes weekly, with an international non-governmental organization. One person expressed their volunteer work as “allow[ing] me to focus on international issues while living locally.” The commitment to doing internationally focused work while back in Canada was often expressed in relation to building awareness in home communities “about the realities that people face overseas.” The work that is done locally was even described as solidarity work that links with international communities in meaningful ways and builds on “a greater sense of solidarity and connection between nations.” These qualitative responses reinforced and helped explain the quantitative findings that helping people in other countries became a higher priority in RVs’ lives.

Advocacy for increasing foreign aid spending: The connections between local actions and international work was further reinforced in the commitments to advocating for increasing Canada’s foreign aid spending. Quantitatively, around 70% agreed that they advocate for increasing Canada’s foreign aid spending (though this was not explicitly linked as a change resulting from their international experience). This link was somewhat stronger considering that nearly half of respondents agreed that they contribute more money to international organizations now than they did before volunteering abroad. The experience abroad was expressed qualitatively as one that “[h]umanized the situation and [thus I] understood the importance of supporting communities in the field according to their needs.” This new understanding then translated into an appreciation for how RVs can influence Canadian international development policy as citizen advocates by using their “knowledge and experience to engage parliamentarians, policymakers, the media and ordinary Canadians on global poverty issues and solutions.” The experience abroad was also considered in relation to a more critical view of Canada’s international role and how development work is (or should be) done.

Locally-based prosocial activities: For the study participants who described their prosocial activities as locally-based or domestic commitments, the work included a variety of contributions, such as community associations or projects (27% of overall responses), political parties or elections (16%), advocacy efforts (7%), and First Nations organizations or projects (4%). When asked to expand on why their interest in volunteering in Canada had changed after volunteering abroad, for 9% of respondents they were inspired to undertake more politically oriented volunteer work and engage more in civic life. The experience abroad for many (15%) led people to look inward to Canadian challenges, heightening their awareness of the scope of issues and their sense of responsibility to engage domestically. It is noteworthy that 11% of respondents indicated that their interest in volunteering domestically existed long before their experience abroad and has not changed as a result. The activities surrounding domestic volunteering work were also, at times, framed as more activist-related work after returning home. “[From] my first experience, I would say that my volunteering in Canada became more politically and social justice focused” and “this volunteering is in fact more a light form of activism.” In exhibiting increased advocacy and activism, as well as a proclivity for domestic political volunteering, several participants demonstrated how concern with – and prioritization of – global issues can be embedded in locally-based prosocial activities and volunteer work.

Financial contributions to international organizations: Many of the qualitative comments also highlighted the nature of increased financial contributions in support of international work.

Although the proportion of people who donated to charitable organizations was nearly the same between the two populations – RVs and the wider Canadian public – the average annual amount of the donations per person was higher for RVs (\$1,176) compared to the general Canadian population in 2013 (\$531) (Statistics Canada, 2018). This figure, however, does not account for differences in the sample of RVs (e.g. higher education and income) compared to the general Canadian population, nor does it consider any differences in inflation or other time-based monetary differences from 2013-2018.

Returned international volunteers described their experiences as opportunities to learn about global issues, which inspired them to demonstrate ongoing support through financial contributions to organizations that continue this work. For those who indicated they do not have time for volunteering, there were references made to regularized donations, sometimes monthly, to international organizations that support prosocial work overseas. First-hand understanding of the challenges of international work during volunteer abroad programs was linked to an appreciation for the complexity of this field and a commitment to ongoing donations to “aid organization[s] even though some projects just don't work!”

Pursuing studies related to social and economic development: Qualitative comments provided to the question “In what ways was your life changed by your international volunteer experience?” show that 22% of respondents expressed a motivation to contribute to the field of development, including making career and/or schooling changes or feeling increased resolve to continue on their chosen career/study paths. Focusing on study changes specifically, over a fifth of these respondents indicated that they made a study change as a result of their international volunteer experience, or otherwise felt that their time abroad reinforced or strengthened their desire to continue their studies in a field related to international development.

For some of the study participants, their life changes resulted in decisions to pursue graduate work (MA or PhD) in international development studies programs. Undertaking additional graduate work was perceived to have career benefits “which ... opened up many career opportunities.” For some participants, their academic interest shifted considerably from fields in science to prosocial academic programs. One participant explained: “I went from pursuing an academic career in theoretical chemistry to one in international development. I could probably write a book about the personal transformation that took place.” For others, the experience abroad afforded an opportunity to revisit goals and aspirations for prosocial careers, beginning with additional educational training in the field. As one person noted, the experience abroad “renewed my passion to study and become involved in human rights, international development, [and] gender equality.” Comments such as these express the transformative experience of volunteering abroad and provide testimonials of the concrete measures RVs have taken to commit themselves to prosocial, global assistance fields.

Pursuing careers related to social and economic development: Focusing on career changes, of the 22% of respondents who expressed a motivation to contribute to the field of social and economic development, more than half (53%) indicated that they either made a career change as a result of their international volunteer experience, or otherwise felt that their time abroad reinforced or strengthened their desire to work in this field. Explanations provided by the participants included reflections on the significance of the “utterly transformative” experience.

The pathways that emerge as a result of international volunteering are often explained by survey participants as study changes, which lead to new opportunities to work in prosocial careers, sometimes directly linked to international development work. Several participants were able to use their international volunteer experiences to launch careers that allowed them to continue working in the country where the placement took place.

Survey participants who indicated long careers of 25 years or more in international development work, documented with rich detail their career trajectories, including the steps between their volunteer placement and their current positions. They noted the nature of different work contracts, combined with returns to university for graduate studies, followed by information about positions abroad with international development organizations (often for extended periods of two or more years per country), all of which they directly link to their IDV experience.

Other survey participants highlighted the way the volunteer abroad experience resulted in a major change in career focus: “[I] completely changed my career path from philosophy or law to international development/cooperation. Currently living abroad for 2+ years working in the same country where I did my volunteer placements.” The comments provided by survey participants were overall positive regarding the shaping of careers. As one person wrote: “I am now working as a journalist focusing on issues related to sustainable travel and international development [and] ... a huge advocate for the change that volunteering abroad can have in young peoples’ lives.” This RV spoke about the IDV experience as a “foundation for understanding the economies of developing countries and some of the factors that affect global politics” – a foundation for a lifetime of work.

The prevalence of career changes among RVs is indicative of the lifetime commitment to global assistance that resulted from the international volunteering experience for many participants. Further, open-ended comments indicated a predominant pathway of international volunteering inspiring study changes that generate new opportunities for work, which subsequently evolve into long careers in globally focused prosocial work.

Career changes focused on helping others: Beyond specifically mentioning international development career paths, numerous survey participants reinforced the value of the international volunteering experience in terms of careers that enable them to engage generally in prosocial work – or work that allows them to help others. Of the 22% who expressed a motivation to contribute to the field of social and economic development when asked how their lives changed as a result of their international volunteer experience, a quarter indicated a desire to make career changes focused on helping others, but not directly related to international development.

The values shared by the participants also included civic engagement with socio-economic issues at home, particularly with immigrant and Indigenous communities in Canada. As one participant noted: “I became more aware of social and economic development issues as well as cultural differences which enabled me to better understand social and economic issues in Canada as well as understand cultural differences in multicultural Canada.” Several participants noted how the international volunteer experience inspired their interests in working with newcomer communities in Canada. These RVs considered the experience one that taught relational skills, and as one person said: “I could really relate to their [newcomers’] experience being in a new

country that they didn't know, that they couldn't speak the language. I am now a social worker working with refugees." In reflecting on other work done to support immigrant communities in Canada, another participant wrote that the international volunteer placement renewed their "desire to work with immigrants" specifically in the areas of literacy and economic opportunities. To further develop the skills needed for this work, the RV enrolled in a program to learn how to teach English as a second language while volunteering as an English tutor in the community.

Other participants linked their volunteer abroad experience to careers in non-profit work. The nature of 'giving back' and helping their home communities is linked to their prosocial careers and understandings of their philanthropic work. As one participant noted, "I contribute a lot to my community via my career" – a reality that is often not well-captured in studies of volunteering and philanthropy. Several participants linked their international experiences to a clearer understanding of injustices and inequalities in the Canadian context. Several referenced the need for improved strategies to address poverty and inequality experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. For one of the RVs, who self-identified as a Native woman who has felt "marginalized and victimized" herself, she recounted how she became "grossly aware of how little Canadian populations regard or care for its Indigenous populations." The experience of IDV "made me more passionate for serving the Indigenous communities across our nation" and inspired her to use her international experience to address "the harm happening in rural Canada" among Indigenous communities.

The IDV experience was also transformational for RVs who gained improved understandings of privilege. As "a typical white kid in the suburbs [...] my life would have been very different without" the volunteer abroad experience. Even for those participants who did not consider their current work to be directly related to international development careers, there was a clear connection between the prosocial qualities of their work and their international exposure. As one survey participant wrote, the experience of being an international volunteer is "woven into the fabric of my life." The influences of the IDV program, he/she went on to explain, are "hard to separate from who and what I am now." While RVs' current work may not be directly related to social justice or international development, they believe their current work is "influenced by it and is reflected in their values, choices, ethics, interests, capabilities, [and] directions." Of significance to several survey participants was the impact of the volunteer abroad experience on their daily life choices including, for some, decisions about how they raise their children.

Discussion and Conclusions

The study findings demonstrate how participation in IDV generates opportunities for transformational learning. These positively impact participants' prosocial behaviours, encouraging RVs to undertake career or study trajectories in social and economic development, as well as inspiring them to engage in global assistance activities, such as volunteering, charitable donations and advocacy work. These programs have the potential to positively contribute to expanding global civic engagement among Canadians, shaping a globally engaged Canadian electorate that understands and prioritizes development assistance, and thus supports government initiatives and programs to address global concerns.

The survey findings further highlight the relationship between IDV and ongoing prosocial behaviours, both in the immediate and long-term for those who returned to Canada. Taken together, these findings reinforce earlier studies that highlight the correlation between international volunteering and prosocial behaviour (see Kelly & Case, 2007; Tiessen & Heron, 2012; Universalis et al, 2005). In addition, they extend and complement these studies by assessing long-term changes in the prosocial attitudes and behaviors experienced by RVs years later.

Positive changes were evident in the eight major outcome areas examined above, namely: increased prioritization of global assistance; involvement in international humanitarian and development projects; higher prioritization of helping others abroad; support for increased government foreign aid spending; undertaking locally-based prosocial activities; financial support for the sending organization and its broader work; changes in study paths and changes in career choices either toward the international development sector, or other prosocial “helping” careers. These findings can be considered in the context of global civic engagement values, particularly in terms of (1) the relational and solidarity-oriented impacts; (2) the emphasis on active engagement including advocacy work and career work; and (3) the enduring impact of these catalytic experiences. The discussion below further elaborates on these three cross-cutting themes.

Relational impacts were captured in reference to RVs’ international relationships and the meaningful connections they formed with other volunteers, development workers and locals in partner communities. Some of the prosocial activities linked understandings of social justice and marginalization and/or poverty to Canadian realities. Other participants viewed their global justice impact in the changes they can make locally. Some RVs noted that their key contribution to international work is through their ongoing commitments to improve Canadians’ understanding of international issues. Other RVs highlighted their regularized contributions to international organizations and ongoing participation in the networks forged when they were international volunteers.

The emphasis on the human side of the connectivity or relational experience is highly evident in the qualitative findings, with references to the IDV experience as one that puts a human face on development and international inequality. Interactions with partner communities through IDV humanized their knowledge or understanding. The emphasis among some of the RVs on solidarity values is also noteworthy, as it speaks to a commitment that is based in shared concerns and responsibility, or thick global citizenship (Cameron, 2014) rather than thin global citizenship values (Cameron, 2014), such as charity or passive compassion for the suffering of others.

In relation to active civic engagement and advocacy, respondents made many references to building awareness, sharing information and educating Canadians. Awareness-building can be a relatively passive process if it is solely informational and not linked to changed attitudes and behaviours. Among the RVs however, there were many references to a more activist orientation in their contributions, including advocacy work and active citizenship. The emphasis by some participants on the blurred lines between global civic engagement in their paid and unpaid employment, brings a new set of insights into the level of prosocial commitments that RVs

exhibit. Many RVs expressed their commitment to justice and social change in their volunteer work as deeply intertwined with their careers, making it difficult to delineate between the two. Together this heightened commitment to – and prioritization of – global assistance and prosocial activities contributes to producing an engaged, globally-minded electorate of citizens, reinforcing their roles as ‘public faces of development’ (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004) as well as their deep and action-oriented global civic engagement.

The third substantive theme emerging from these findings is the longevity of the prosocial behaviours and the sustained commitments RVs express to global civic engagement. The IDV experience was not generally viewed among the RVs in this study as a one-off experience that was unrelated to their lives and work. Rather, the IDV placement served “as a foundation” that launched their commitments to prosocial change. A particularly noteworthy finding from the study was the emphasis on career changes that resulted from exposure to the volunteer work completed abroad. This work was described as “transformational” or “pivotal”, shaping not just the kind of career people pursued after returning home, but also the ongoing values developed through this work. This speaks to the enduring global citizenship engagement observed in these findings and also the expansion of such values and commitments to prosocial activities throughout the lives of the RVs.

It is important to recognize that not all the RVs’ recollections were positive, nor were all reported changes constructive. While the vast majority of respondents agreed with the measures of prosocial changes, a marginal percentage disagreed or even strongly disagreed with these sentiments. For instance, some RVs expressed concern with the use of funds that are earmarked for international development work to send Canadians overseas. RVs observed the “ineffective use of resources and mediocre performance of staff”, as well as the “lack of monitoring and poor results year after year.” Others noted experiencing “burn out” or “trauma” while abroad, which negatively affected their desire to volunteer again or pursue development-related careers. Further research is needed to understand why international volunteering may turn some people away from socially constructive career choices or may deepen their criticism of global assistance policies and practices.

Future research could also benefit from expanding the sampling frame to capture the 70,000+ Canadians who have participated in IDV through the VCP and the many more Canadians who take part in diverse volunteer abroad options. Future research can also more carefully distinguish between different program modalities, taking into consideration the growing number of short-term and for-profit volunteer sending organizations (organizations that were not the focus of this study). More in-depth qualitative work can also help unpack some of the comparatively brief comments provided in the open-ended survey questions. For example, it is not known what specific forms of advocacy and activism RVs engage in. It is also difficult to know what features of RVs’ experiences correlate to a heightened advocacy with direct, politically based action. Similarly, additional qualitative evidence on the conditions whereby an international volunteering experience becomes “transformational” would help IVCOs program for transformational learning. Importantly, further investigation is also needed into the horizontal and vertical impacts of international volunteering to fully understand the scope of its effects, including intergenerational impacts, as well as the pathways of influence returned volunteers exert on their various circles of influence – from family and friends to their elected

representatives. Although studies of international volunteering using a specific sample of Canadians are relatively few, further disaggregation of the sample can more accurately pinpoint the variety of impacts international volunteering has on diverse groups of Canadian society, such as individuals from various diasporas and socioeconomic groups.

In summary, this research adds an important layer in the analysis of IDV and informs broader international development and global citizenship scholarship. The findings demonstrate important linkages between IDV, cross-cultural interactions, and the shaping of global civic engagement values. This study is focused exclusively on the experiences and career outcomes of Canadian RVs and not on the benefits or challenges of partner organizations and communities – a concern also identified by several survey respondents and the focus of some other related research (Lough & Tiessen, 2018; Tiessen, Grantham, & Lough, 2018; Tiessen & Lough, 2018). While this study is not an assessment of the impact of these programs on partner countries and communities, findings suggest that the changes made by volunteers can add value to host nations. This research does however, underscore how IDV can build a stronger national society comprised of people who are actively engaged in prosocial activities that reinforce global civic engagement values. As such, there is potential indirect benefit for partner countries in the Global South, particularly if the prosocial behaviours of the RVs result in advocacy for a stronger Canadian focus on international development and social justice priorities.

References:

- Archer, C. M. (1986). Cultural Bump and Beyond. In J.M.Valdes (Ed.), *Culture Bound: Bridging the Culture Gap in Language Teaching* (pp. 170–178). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Binns, T. & McLachlan, S. (2018). “Exploring host perspectives towardscon younger international development volunteers”, *Development in Practice*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 65-79.
- Cameron, J. (2014). “Grounding Experiential Learning in ‘Thick’ Conceptions of Global Citizenship” in Tiessen, R. & Huish, R. *Globetrotting or Global Citizenship: Perils and Potential of International Experiential Learning*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 21-43.
- Chen, J. (2018). Understanding development impact in international development volunteering: A relational approach. *The Geographical Journal*, 184(2), 138–147.
- Compton Brouwer, R. *Canada’s Global Villagers – CUSO in Development, 1961-86*, Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Devereux, P. (2008). International Volunteering for Development and Sustainability: Outdated Paternalism or a Radical Response to Globalisation? *Development in Practice*, 18(3), 357–370.
- Fee, A., & Gray, S. J. (2013). Transformational Learning Experiences of International Development Volunteers in the Asia-Pacific: The Case of a Multinational NGO. *Journal of World Business*, 48, 196–208.

- GAC (Global Affairs Canada). 2019. "Volunteer Cooperation Program", Government of Canada. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/study_work_travel-etude_travail_voyage/volunteer_cooperation_program-programme_cooperation_volontaire.aspx?lang=eng
- Glass, J. "Decades of Change: A Short History of International Development Organizations in Canada", *The Philanthropist*, May 11. Accessed online on October 18, 2019 at: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2015/05/decades-of-change-a-short-history-of-international-development-organizations-in-canada/>
- Kelly, S., & Case, R. (2007). *The Overseas Experience: A Passport to Improved Volunteerism*.
- Laywine, N. (2017). "Emotional Extractions: The Recruitment Practices and Experiential Dimensions of International Volunteerism", Doctoral dissertation submitted to McGill University.
- Lough, B. J. (2015). *The evolution of international volunteering*. Bonn, Germany: United Nations Volunteers.
- Lough, B. J., & Tiessen, R. (2018). How do international volunteering characteristics influence outcomes? Perspectives from partner organizations. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 29(1), 104–118.
- McGloin, C. & Georgeou, N. (2015). "'Looks good on your CV': The sociology of voluntourism recruitment in higher education. *Journal of Sociology*, 52(2), 1-15.
- McLachlan, S., & Binns, T. (2019). Exploring host perspectives towards younger international development volunteers. *Development in Practice*, 29(1), 65–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2018.1524850>
- Mostafanezhad, M. (2014). *Volunteer tourism: Popular humanitarianism in neoliberal times*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub Co.
- Omoto, A.M. and Snyder, M. (2009). "Influences of Psychological Sense of Community on Voluntary Helping and Prosocial Action". In *The Psychology of Prosocial Behavior: Group Processes, Intergroup Relations, and Helping* (eds. S. Stürmer and M. Snyder). Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 223-243.
- Schech, S., Mundkur, A., Skelton, T., & Kothari, U. (2015). New spaces of development partnership: Rethinking international volunteering. *Progress in Development Studies*, 15(4), 358–370.
- Sherraden, M. S., Lough, B. J., & McBride, A. M. (2008). Effects of international volunteering and service: Individual and institutional predictors. *Voluntas*, 19(4), 395–421. doi:10.1007/s11266-008-9072-x
- Smith, M. & Yanacopulos, H. (2004). The Public Faces of Development: An Introduction. *Journal of International Development*, 16(5), 657-664.
- Sobocinska, A. (2017). How to win friends and influence nations: the international history of Development Volunteering. *Journal of Global History*, 12(1), 49–73.
- Starr, J. M. (1994). Peace Corps Service as a Turning Point. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 39(2), 137–161.

- Statistics Canada. (2018). General Social Survey – Giving, Volunteering and Participating (GSS GVP). <http://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&SDDS=4430>
- Stürmer, S. and Snyder, M. (2009). “The Psychological Study of Group Processes and Intergroup Relations in Prosocial Behavior: Past, Present, Future.” In *The Psychology of Prosocial Behavior: Group Processes, Intergroup Relations, and Helping*, eds. S. Stürmer and M. Snyder. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., pp. 3-10.
- Tiessen, R. (2018). *Learning and Volunteering Abroad for Development: Unpacking Host Organization and Volunteer Rationales*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Tiessen, R. (2014). “Career Aspirations and Experiential Learning Abroad: Perspectives from Canadian youth on short-term placements in Tiessen, R. & Huish, R. *Globe trotting or Global Citizenship: Perils and Potentials of International Experiential Learning*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 77-90.
- Tiessen, R., & Heron, B. (2012). Volunteering in the Developing World: The Perceived Impacts of Canadian Youth. *Development in Practice*, 22(1), 44–56.
- Tiessen, R., Grantham, K. E., & Lough, B. J. (Eds.). (2018). Insights on international volunteering, Perspectives from the Global South. Bonn, Germany: *Voluntaris: Journal of Volunteer Services*; Nomos.
- Tiessen, R., & Lough, B. J. (2018). International Volunteering Capacity Development: Volunteer Partner Organization Experiences of Mitigating Factors for Effective Practice. *Forum for Development Studies*, 46(2), 299–320.
- Universalia, Jackson & Associates Ltd., & Salasan. (2005). *The Power of Volunteering: A Review of the Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program* (Evaluation Report). CIDA.

¹ Global South refers to countries that have low overall Gross National Product (GNP) or a low ranking in the Human Development Index (HDI), where rates of poverty, inequality, and insecurity are usually high.