International Volunteers: Cheap help or transformational solidarity toward sustainable development

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This thesis is presented for the degree of

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Peter Devereux
Abstract

There is a dearth of research on the work of international volunteers in development even though they have been operating for over 50 years and it is a growing field of interest. This research investigates the current international development context and the characteristics, contributions and recognition of international volunteers who serve, through independent international volunteer cooperation organisations (IVCOs), for at least one year in development and sustainability work. International volunteers are an expression of civil society’s interest in international development providing a public face for development practices. International volunteers are not generally regarded as a significant part of aid from donor countries yet they address the Paris Declaration principles on development effectiveness like mutual accountability more successfully in many cases than conventional technical assistance.

My research methods included reflection and analysis of my personal and professional experience; reviewing documentation and research literature; a six week email discussion hosted by United Nations Volunteers World Volunteer Web with participants in 100 countries; an email survey of 30 international volunteers across 16 countries; and interviewing 24 volunteers and 75 other stakeholders mainly in Central America and Cambodia. The email survey and interview results were organised and analysed using NVivo software.

There is now mainstream consensus on major problems with conventional forms of development, particularly through technical assistance. Key elements of the international volunteer role and characteristics were found to be particularly conducive to improve on past practices and fit the new requirements of the current development context and its key links to sustainability. These include the importance of
accompaniment and three way accountability (between local host, IVCO and volunteer); the relevance of living and working under local conditions and engaging with cross cultural issues; as well as important learning, liaison and bridging roles. Recognition of the volunteer contributions by Southern hosts and other development stakeholders was higher than even they expected with special recognition of complementary but distinct roles. However with this recognition comes the temptation to encourage volunteers and IVCOs to reproduce the existing roles and characteristics of other development practitioners.

Philosophically and practically, international volunteers for development and sustainability fit well within a relational view of development. This relational view emphasises capacity development, reciprocal learning and an indirect approach to cultivate respect for local ownership, autonomy and accountability in development. The research concludes with four key recommendations for research and practice in the sector and a personal reflection. The recommendations encourage: 1.) IVCOs to compare international volunteer contributions against the Paris Principles and not dilute their approach to duplicate existing development practice; 2.) further research on international volunteer contributions to the Paris Principles and relational development by investigating the experience of IVCOs, volunteers and communities before, during and after assignments; 3.) further research comparing volunteer development experiences by duration, country, IVCO type, host category and sector; and 4.) organisational analysis of IVCOs compared to other development and volunteer organisations.
Publication List

Aspects of this thesis have been accepted for publication:

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABV</td>
<td>Australian Business Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGVP</td>
<td>Australian Government Volunteer Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AG-CS</td>
<td>Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APSO</td>
<td>Agency for Personal Service Overseas (Irish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUSAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVA</td>
<td>Australian Volunteers Abroad (program)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AVI</td>
<td>Australian Volunteers International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYAD</td>
<td>Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BESO</td>
<td>British Executive Service Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CA</td>
<td>Central America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAA</td>
<td>Community Aid Abroad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campesino</td>
<td>CA Spanish for small scale/subsistence farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>capacity development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDRI</td>
<td>Cambodia Development Resource Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CID</td>
<td>Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIIR</td>
<td>Catholic Institute for International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAC</td>
<td>Development Assistance Committee (of OECD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>UK Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DW</td>
<td>Development worker (Skillshare/Progressio name for their volunteers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECOSOC</td>
<td>United Nations Economic and Social Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FACS</td>
<td>Fundación Augusto Cesar Sandino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FVS</td>
<td>Finnish Volunteer Service</td>
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HIPC  Heavily Indebted Poor Country
ICA   the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas
ICD  International Cooperation for Development (CIIRs overseas program)
IDS  Institute of Development Studies, at the University of Sussex
IICD  International Institute for Communication and Development
IVCO  International Volunteer Cooperation Agency
IYV  International Year of the Volunteer
JICA  Japanese International Cooperation Agency
JOCV  Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers
KEPA  Kehitysyhteiston Palvelukeskus (Finnish Service Centre for
Development Cooperation)
MDGs  Millennium Development Goals
MOU  Memorandum of Understanding
MS  Mellemfolkeligt Samivirke (now MS Actionaid Denmark)
NGO  Non Governmental Organisation
NNGO  Northern Development NGO
NZODA  New Zealand Official Development Assistance
OECD  Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLIC  Other Low Income Countries (per capita GNI < $825 in 2004)
OSB  Overseas Service Bureau
PD  Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (signed 2005)
PIU  Project Implementing Unit
PPA  Partnership Program Agreement
ROAR  Results Oriented Annual Report
SNGO  Southern Development NGO
SRC  Social Responsibilities Commission (of Anglican Diocese of Perth)
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Technical Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>Technical Cooperation</td>
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<tr>
<td>TOR</td>
<td>Terms of Reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSEMP</td>
<td>Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCA</td>
<td>Universidad Centroamericana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNAIDS</td>
<td>Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNV</td>
<td>United Nations Volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4D</td>
<td>Volunteering for development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBM</td>
<td>voluntary biological monitoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDS</td>
<td>Volunteer Development Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIDA</td>
<td>Volunteering for International Development from Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSO</td>
<td>Voluntary Service Overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSP</td>
<td>Volunteer Service Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCC</td>
<td>World Council of Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WFP</td>
<td>World Food Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>WSSD</td>
<td>World Summit on Sustainable Development</td>
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My most life changing experience was travelling to Nicaragua in 1987 and I am forever in the debt of people there who were so patient and generous with their time, their resources and their ideas. My thanks go to Jose Robleto, Mario Gutierrez, Gerardo Jimenez and other staff in the Ecology and Natural Resources school of the Central American University who assisted me with my Spanish and my work. Edwin Zablah, Evaristo Garcia and Sonia Cano and many other compañeros at FACS were also my stalwart educators and supporters. I also was inspired by friends in the Nicaraguan countryside like Jose Ramon and Petrona who demonstrated in practice the tenacity, resourcefulness and generosity of campesinos in Nicaragua. Other people in Fiji, Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Cambodia, Cuba and Sri Lanka have also given me a profound respect for the wisdom of the South. Our time in the South also brought us
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how volunteering provided a different angle on development from both Bill Armstrong
and Daniel Knott in Overseas Service Bureau. Equally fundamental was the
involvement and openness of international volunteers, host organisations and observers
—I hope their words speak to you as they did to me. I truly hope the research will
provide a concrete expression of my thanks that can further promote critical thinking
and effective action through volunteering and development.
Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis is focused on the work of long term\(^1\) international volunteers for development and sustainability. It investigates the characteristics, contributions and recognition of these volunteers and provides an opportunity to rethink current conceptions of development.

At least since President Truman’s famous 1947 call to combat ‘underdevelopment’ the meaning and practice of development has been debated for over 60 years (Escobar, 1995). The more recent concern for sustainable development gained prominence from the Brundtland Commission (Brundtland & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It emerged as a way of bringing development and environmental ideas together and evolved to the more contemporary notion of sustainability.

Sustainability refers to the viability of socially shaped relationships between society and nature over long periods of time. Thus environmental sustainability turns out to be closely linked to supposedly ‘internal’ problems of social structure, such as social justice, gender equality and political participation. Putting the question this way involves not only the issue of economic efficiency but those of social justice and political regulation as well. (Becker, Jahn, & Stiess, 1999, p. 382)

Sustainability emphasises the interaction that happens between societies and nature and the crucial links with problems of social justice and political participation. Under this analysis it should be conceptualised in relational terms that reflect the long term viability of the interaction between the environment and society together rather than individually (1999).

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\(^1\) For the purposes of my research of volunteers in a development context I have chosen to look at volunteers who spend a minimum of a year on assignment, more frequently two or occasionally more.
International volunteers for development and sustainability is a fruitful area for study because of the potential synergies between development, volunteerism and sustainability concepts and practice. While there has been a small but growing body of research about national volunteering over the last 25 years, international volunteering remains an area of limited investigation. Emerging research on international volunteering has built on previous work on national volunteering, for example John Wilson’s (2000) work and Anheier and Salamon’s (1999) article on “volunteering in cross-national perspective”. Volunteer tourism has emerged most recently as an area of great research interest (European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education & Tourism Research and Marketing, 2008; Lyons & Wearing, 2008; Wearing, 2001).

However, in many respects these areas of research do not fit the same mould as long term international volunteering, particularly given its development focus. Nevertheless, there are strong, positive and interesting synergies for cross referencing. Research also exists about cross-national volunteering, even though this is more likely to focus on international comparisons of national volunteering than the idea of volunteers operating in international development settings.

Two research studies on volunteering for development provide the most significant existing basis for the present thesis. Irene Pinkau completed a unique evaluation of what she termed ‘volunteer development services’ in the 1970s based in 15 countries culminating in a three volume report entitled Service for Development (Pinkau, 1977). Pinkau’s study covered four main categories: training and employment schemes; study services; social and technical services; and foreign volunteer services. More recently, Joel Rehnstrom (2000) published the results of his research on the impact of the United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Program in Nepal. A small number of other studies have been agency specific for example on the Peace Corps (Cohn & Wood, 1982) or have been not
so specifically focused on development, for example a recent desk study on returned international volunteers (Machin, 2008).

My research covers the work of a number of independent\(^2\) International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs) and does not attempt to measure their impact. I cover territory that is broader than Rehnstrom’s by including a range of countries and independent IVCOs. I am focused just on the work of international volunteers facilitated by independent IVCOs rather than the broader volunteer services that Pinkau also covered. My research is solidly founded on my own experience and insights as a practitioner as well as a researcher, through being a volunteer, a volunteer facilitator and an international volunteer for development and sustainability. In this way I produce a unique critical reflection on the characteristics, contribution and recognition of international volunteers in development and sustainability.

**Autobiography**

My world view has been profoundly influenced by my early family influences, the nature of my work and volunteer experience in social justice, development and sustainability. This was consolidated when I achieved my goal of university entry into environmental science to learn holistically about people’s interactions with the environment in the early 1980s.

As Miles and Huberman (1994) say: “To know how a researcher construes the shape of the social world and aims to give us a credible account of it is to know our conversational partner” (p. 4). I aim to do “phronetic research” so as “to produce input to the ongoing social dialogue and praxis in a society, rather than to generate ultimate,

\(^2\) I regard independent IVCOs as those which are independent in terms of governance from any one government or religious influence.
unequivocally verified knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 139). My quest is to bring together theory and practice to achieve more effective volunteerism for more successful development praxis.

I grew up in a household grounded by hard work through my creative craftsman carpenter father and my university educated, active, and critical thinker mother. Together they taught me the importance of practical action and critical reflection. My mother grew up in India with her parents. My grandparents died while I was quite young but their example working under local conditions for 30 years as Baptist missionaries in development, inculcated in me the importance of the equality of all people and the need for justice and development to achieve this. I looked for opportunities to engage myself in similar struggles for justice and development.

My environmental science studies provided a strong scientific framework tempered also by an approach that looks holistically at environmental issues and the connections between people, resources and environmental concerns. They consolidated my early interest in an interdisciplinary approach to environmental issues that went beyond pure science to emphasise the PEOPLE side of resolving the environmental issues at stake including the different perspectives and considerations of these issues from North and South eyes. The university’s interdisciplinary approach also fostered a healthy respect

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3 I use the terms North and South to refer to the international countries called in the past developed and developing or developed and underdeveloped or First world and Third world. Fowler (1998:202) uses the phrase South and East to include “traditional recipients of international aid and the newly independent states of East and Central Europe respectively”. The NS geographical nomenclature is an attempt to be slightly less value laden although another more affirmative action laden term used is also ¼ ¾ world. Significant internal country inequality has also led some to rightfully talk of the north in the south and south in the north. Others have rightly questioned the economically dominated frame of development over human concerns for education, health, participation, culture, community etc. Hence a need for new categories beyond this dualism however at present we have to work with the reality that the basis of development cooperation is still commonly reflected along these N-S and economic lines though in an increasingly globalised world and with the emerging states like India and China the context is fluid. Also the fact that Australia is one of few ‘developed’ countries in the geographic south provides opportunities for closer relationships with our Southern neighbours. UNDP and others have responded to the economic limitations of the NS dualism, to some extent through alternatives like the human development index.
for critiques of the supposedly objective scientific method in its social science courses like “Environmental Ethics” and “Structure, Thought and Reality”\(^4\). They encouraged a sociological and philosophical angle on the environment that fosters a holistic perspective and remedies that stressed the social, cultural, political and economic interdependence that had to be part of any constructive long term solution. This approach is explicitly reflected in the sustainability definition cited earlier (Becker, et al., 1999).

While an undergraduate, I joined Community Aid Abroad (CAA) as an opportunity to further my interest and practical engagement with international development and justice issues. Still today I am actively engaged with it under its new name of OXFAM Australia. Instead of volunteering to distribute and sell fair trade tea as I began, I am now on the national Board of Directors. Through CAA I heard about the inspiring struggles of the Nicaraguan people who had in 1979 shaken off their long history of brutal dictatorship to try and rebuild their country around participatory development principles. I was inspired by the Nicaraguans’ resolve that had, for example eradicated polio through community health mobilisation, reduced significantly illiteracy by shipping their university students out on a literacy crusade and created their country’s first environment ministry that began its ecological restoration with reforestation around degraded cotton field dustbowls. Along with a group of Perth friends, I helped set up a CAA group called the Nicaragua Support Group that had a country specific educational and fundraising theme in contrast to the common model of other CAA suburban members’ groups. One “pig husbandry project” we were supporting on a cooperative in Northern Nicaragua had to be abandoned when the cooperative was attacked by the US backed Contra anti government forces, with many deaths and casualties. This link to the

\(^4\) When I completed my degree, students from science disciplines had to complete a minimum quota of social science units and students from social sciences had to do a similar quota from the sciences.
harsh reality of the Nicaraguans we were directly supporting reinforced my growing appreciation of the political nature of development and conflict. Because of my Baptist church family background, I also began corresponding with Tomás Tellez, the head of the Baptist Convention of Nicaragua, as a way of getting personalised and more independent information about what was happening in Nicaragua, rather than just having to rely on mainstream media reports, often from a partisan US dominated media. Tomás’s letters demonstrated the injustice of the Contra war and the political nature of development in a way that was rare to hear in Perth Baptist church circles.

After completing my degree, there were few purely environmental science positions available in Perth so one of my environmental science lecturers, Peter Newman, suggested I volunteer for the Anglican Social Responsibilities Commission (SRC) newly set up by the Perth Anglican Diocese to research and promote discussion and action on social issues. As the group was wholly made up of busy professionals who volunteered their out of paid work time for the Commission, it was difficult to make sufficient progress on the increasing array of issues of concern. With my volunteer work the Commission activity quickly gained momentum and recognition to the point where someone donated a stipend for my work. Before long with solid appreciation of the Commission’s work on a range of issues from housing access to human rights, this volunteer stipend was superseded by a formal budget line salary in the Diocesan budget for Commission Executive Officer. In my spare time I continued to work actively as the volunteer secretary for the Nicaragua Support Group.

One of the activities of our Nicaragua Support Group was to encourage Australians to be part of exposure tours to Nicaragua to see first hand what was happening there and provide a small contribution to harvesting their national coffee crop. Coffee was
fundamental to the Nicaraguan economy but its production was under significant pressure at harvest time because of the ferocity of the Contra war in the northern mountains near the border where much of the best coffee plantations were. I went to Nicaragua at Christmas time 1986/1987 as part of a ‘solidarity brigade’ to pick coffee in the mountains for three weeks and then see what was happening around Nicaragua through a week study tour. The brigade was aimed at providing foreigners with a first hand account of what was happening in Nicaragua as well as an opportunity to provide practical unskilled assistance. The brigade could be called “an immersion” experience -- a short term ‘experiential learning’ opportunity to be immersed in the local reality which was so different to my Perth one and a way of understanding better what was required to support change and development (Irvine, Chambers, & Eyben, 2006). The first hand account was a powerful opportunity to meet Nicaraguans at all levels from poor campesinos on coffee farms to government and community organisers in rural and urban areas. It was also a brief opportunity to live under similar circumstances to Nicaraguan people, eat a solid Nicaraguan diet of beans, rice and tortillas, and experience their work, living conditions and culture and hear their Spanish language. The three week volunteer work contribution coffee picking went beyond a common immersion experience because of the hard physical work. It was still small and relatively insignificant compared to volume of coffee gathered by the skilled Nicaraguans we picked alongside. However the symbolic value of the work alongside them was clearly appreciated as supportive solidarity that inspired us as much as it bolstered their spirits, in the midst of the hardships and danger experienced, particularly as a result of the Contra war. It made us much more aware of the economic hardships of a developing country. The coffee picking brigade was an experience that highlighted the Nicaraguans’ substantial achievements in wrestling control back from the dictatorship at
great human cost but also their incredible tenacity, vitality, ingenuity, generosity and hope in this rebuilding phase.

At the end of the coffee picking brigade I stayed on in Nicaragua to see if there was work that I was better skilled for. So I could come back and assist them. I visited the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) to see if I could speak with the Vice Chancellor who had been on a speaking tour in Australia requesting volunteer collaboration. He was not in the country when I visited so I left a letter saying I would be willing to save up the necessary funds and come back in a year’s time once I had done that, if they thought I could make a useful contribution. A month after my return to Australia I received a letter from the UCA saying they would like me to return and work in their Ecology and Natural Resources Department. In 1987 I saved everything I could from my, by then, paid Social Responsibilities Commission executive officer’s position, to cover the cost of airfare and living costs in Nicaragua. I had married my girlfriend Leigh late September after admitting that unless we both moved to Nicaragua things could not continue. On December 27 1987 we headed to Nicaragua with three suitcases and our mountain bikes. In my first year I worked directly with the Director and teachers in the Ecology and Natural Resources school of the UCA, supporting their teaching and research and helping with funding submissions and their English so as they could make better use of the largely US text books and journals they used. It was not until my second year that my understanding of the language, culture and country context was sufficient to be able to prepare and teach classes in general ecology and at this time I began to receive from the university a local teaching wage in Cordobas. The pay was the equivalent of the money required for ¼ of our monthly rent portion on a house we shared with 3 other international volunteers who were also working with local institutions for local pay.
After our first two years in Nicaragua we acceded to a request from our families to return home for the birth of our first child and used the last of our savings to buy airfares home. Immediately on our return to Perth we applied to the Overseas Service Bureau’s (OSB) Australian Volunteers Abroad program which had by this stage begun to support volunteers beyond their normal territory of Asia, Africa and the Pacific to include Central America. With OSB support of briefing, airfares, insurance and a living allowance to cover our basic costs, we were back in Nicaragua by August 1990 and my Occupational Therapist partner Leigh worked full time for a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) Los Pipitos while I enjoyed primary care of our baby for 9 months. At that stage the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) supported the placement of families through the volunteer program. We were delighted at the two week OSB briefing in Melbourne before departure because we learned many useful development and cross cultural tips like the process of adapting to another culture and pace and the importance of understanding well yourself and your own culture as a precursor to understanding and respecting the culture and practices of the placement country (Paige, 1993). These were, for us, hard learned realities from our first two years in Nicaragua and we counselled our fellow impending volunteers to take it on board as crucially useful, though some complained they would rather be at home tackling the ‘really important’ preparatory tasks like vaccinations and finding teaching or reference materials.

5 In February 1990 there were elections in Nicaragua and the Sandinista party that had led the ousting of the dictatorship and governed from 1979-1990 narrowly lost power to a centre right coalition of 21 parties led by Violetta Chamorro. While initially we felt unsettled by the political change, upon reflection we felt that our commitment was with the Nicaraguan people and decided to continue our solidarity with the Nicaraguan people and organisations we had come to know. We knew that while we were grateful that immense human, social, economic and environmental cost of the US sponsored contra war would end with a government they favoured, other struggles may ensue.
My role as primary carer for our baby son, waiting in line at the local health clinic for vaccinations and shopping in the local market reminded me of the resource constraints around us and yet the genuine resolve of the Nicaraguans to tackle the basic issues of health care, food security and education for all in a fair and systematic way. Returning to Nicaragua as a family, we were struck by how differently we were embraced back in the Managua barrio we had lived in now that we had a baby who seemed to gain immediate community ownership. On the bus, in the market, in workplaces and at conferences he would be grabbed and shared around with delight. I complemented my child carer role with some informal Nicaraguan liaison work for development NGO’s Community Aid Abroad in Australia and CORSO in New Zealand. These roles changed when I was asked to provide a briefing for staff at the Nicaraguan NGO La Fundación Augusto C Sandino (FACS) on the linkages between environment and development because they were keen to link the two in their policy and practice. At the end of the workshop I organised, the FACS planning director thanked me and surprised me with the suggestion that they wanted me to be their environmental adviser. FACS was one of Nicaragua’s largest and most credible development NGOs that did global advocacy and policy work as well as channelling support from donors all over the world (including CAA, OXFAM Great Britain and many others) to participatory development projects all over Nicaragua. I happily accepted their proposal as did OSB, who would, this way get twice the concrete outcomes for the same living allowance, given they were already paying us to support Leigh’s work. I worked on a huge variety of practical and policy/advocacy work, including integrating environmental policy across FACS projects, incorporating sustainability into agriculture projects, environmental consciousness raising, education projects and linking environmental conditions to health

Interestingly since that time AusAID has become less willing to support families in volunteer work apparently on the grounds that they cannot provide cost effective outcomes compared to their costs. This view is at odds with our experience in Nicaragua where having a family there with us really assisted our integration into the local community and organisations where we worked. It also contributed to a sense of cross cultural awareness and global citizenship in our whole family.
project interventions. I also provided background research support to FACS’ advocacy and networking work as a member of the International Council of Voluntary Agencies and the NGO Working Group on the World Bank as well as regional forums like the Asociación Latinoamericana de Organizaciones de Promoción (ALOP) (Latin American Association of Development Organisations).

Our OSB allowance stayed the same as it was already calculated on covering our basic costs so there was no need to augment it except for some support with childcare costs. However, the added bonus for me was that FACS, in line with Australian Volunteers International (AVI) policy of seeking local buy in support, provided me with no pay but otherwise the same conditions as their local workers. This support included daily lunch and the monthly AFA (sack of arroz-rice, frijoles- beans and azúcar-sugar to mitigate the effects of inflation on local workers’ pay packets paid in Cordobas) and viaticos—a daily allowance to cover the basics of accommodation or food when doing work outside Managua. In 1992 both Los Pipitos and FACS asked for contract extensions for Leigh and me, and by 1994 we had completed the usual four year maximum term with Overseas Service Bureau. Despite this there were special extension requests from both Los Pipitos and FACS for us to assist in finalising existing capacity development and other initiatives. For example, FACS wanted me to help facilitate preparation of a funding request for an AusAID funded reforestation project. They also wanted my assistance with preparation of a comic style sustainable agriculture manual combining permaculture principles with Central American sustainability practices, which was to be funded partly with assistance from the Melbourne based Permaculture Global Assistance Network and OSB. On the basis of completing this work, an extension for one further year was approved by OSB, delaying our return to Perth until 1995. Both of these initiatives proved very successful with AusAID funding the reforestation project.
and FACS being so pleased with the ‘living agriculture’ manual that they doubled the print run at their own expense.

On reflection, what I contributed in Nicaragua from my environmental science background (and how that meshed with what the Nicaraguans’ taught me) was to some extent outweighed by the new perspective on the world that I took home with me to Australia. Far from needing to feel sympathy for people in poverty, it was impossible not to be inspired and empowered by their local knowledge and achievements in the face of adversity and injustice. Looking back at a letter from the Director of the Nicaraguan NGO FACS, where I had worked between 1991 and 1995, showed their clear recognition of this. It said in summary, thanks for your help, then:

To your far away land you will surely take what you have learnt of the customs and characteristics of our people, among them, perhaps the most important being the desire for progress and social justice. We hope that your stay in our Central American country has been valuable in your formation as an Australian citizen, friend of the Nicaraguans. (Zablah, 1995)

In other words the Nicaraguan NGO director saw clear value in what I had done with them but also what they had taught me. They could see it contributing to my becoming a more active and informed Australian citizen, who understands my links to the world partly through the lens of my Nicaraguan experience. This included my new understanding of their history of difficult relations with the North as well as many strong human relationships and learnings that had challenged and inspired me.

On return to Perth in 1995 I was keen to put my practical experience in environment and development into a theoretical context so I enrolled part time in a Masters degree in Ecologically Sustainable Development while I worked part time. Leigh and I also began voluntarily sharing our overseas volunteer experience with others in Perth via workshops, community groups and the media, including presenting a community radio
show on 100 FM called “Developing Issues”. I also became the AVI volunteer representative on the local management committee of the One World Education and Resource Centre that provided school and community global education.

In 1996 I obtained paid work with AVI recruiting and briefing people to work as international volunteers as well as working with returned volunteers to encourage them to share their experience with the Australian community and join local initiatives that contributed to development outcomes. Through my AVI work I became conscious that while my part time postgraduate studies were allowing me to document within an academic framework my experiences and insights into development, there was little research on International volunteers’ development contribution, which I immediately identified as an important gap. How could there be so much reflection about development and development NGOs and yet so little academic discussion of the specific contribution of international volunteers and IVCOs to development. Parallel with this question was why the work of Australian volunteers seemed so little recognised by the Official Australian Aid Program compared for example to its support and recognition of the development NGO sector. Unlike the seemingly ignored or unrecognised role of international volunteers, few people disputed the important role of NGOs in international development efforts even if this was not well documented (D. Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006). However even these same development NGOs did not seem to embrace the concept of international voluntarism for development or the NGOs that facilitated their work.

In 1999 my application was successful to become a UNV volunteer in Fiji and I obtained leave without pay from AVI. I was to be a UNV Program Officer responsible for Fiji and 9 other Pacific Island countries. I was contracted as a standard UNV
international volunteer while my role was to work within the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Fiji multi-country office and work with UNV headquarters to recruit, brief and support UNV volunteers and promote UNV’s broader volunteerism policy and promotion work. This involved, for example being the focal point for facilitating the celebration of the 2001 International year of Volunteers (IYV) and its four themes of volunteer recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion. Through my UNV work I had liaison with a range of Pacific development players ranging from Pacific Island Government officials and NGO representatives, communities, individuals and coalitions, to UN agencies and international aid donors like AusAID and New Zealand Official Development Assistance (NZODA). This was in addition to constant liaison with international and national volunteers from Pacific Island Nations and other countries of both North and South, as well as community and government host organisation representatives and members of the grassroots Pacific community.

UNV was an organisation that was large enough to be able to work not just on the ground through volunteers but also at research, policy and promotion levels as demonstrated by the IYV work. As a result my day to day work in the Pacific was enlivened by global discussion and dialogue about the role of volunteers in development such as that produced in 2001 by Justin Davis Smith on *Volunteering and Social Development* (United Nations Volunteers, 2001). I was excited particularly by Davis Smith’s acknowledgement of mutual aid and self help as a category of voluntarism, which the paper acknowledged as a common form of volunteerism in the South. This was of particular interest to me because it seemed to fit the development context better. It went beyond the more common and more limited conception of volunteering defined by volunteering for someone/something else that shouldn’t include self, family or
friends. It was less individually focussed and more open to communal or community focussed cultural norms which have a rich and important tradition in the South. It was also more political by including advocacy work as volunteering, like the way my neighbour Jen and I had organised to mobilise our street community for traffic calming, and the sort of governance work I now do as part of the OXFAM board. Davis Smith (2001) provided key elements to his broad conceptual framework for volunteering to accommodate the reality that “volunteering takes on different forms and meanings in different settings” that is “strongly influenced by the history, politics, religion and culture of a region” (p. 3). This reality is also not only important for considering volunteering in cross cultural settings of the South but also in the North as noted for example by Wilson et al. (2001) talking about different conceptions of volunteering in Maori culture. They quote from personal correspondence from a non-Maori about the different ways of seeing between himself as non-Maori and a Maori friend

(Stansfield, 2001 cited in C. Wilson, et al., 2001):

> When I get up as a Pakeha and mow my own lawns, I mow my lawns…When I go down the road to the disabled children’s home and mow their lawns I volunteer to do something for the other….When my friend Huhana gets up and mows her lawns, she mows her lawns, when she goes down to the Kohanga Reo and mows lawns, she mows her lawns. When she moves across and mows the lawns at the Marae and the Hauora, she mows her lawns—because there is no sense of “other”. (p. 129)

Davis Smith’s conceptual framework had five key elements based on reward, free-will, benefit, organisational setting and commitment. These translated to a ‘bottom line’ that a.) volunteering was not primarily for financial benefit and any financial reward had to be less than market value; b.) free will meant government could not force participation; c.) there must be a clear beneficiary beyond (or as well as) the volunteer; d.) organisational setting can be organised or informal including one off and individual to individual; e.) while mostly a sustained commitment is imagined, sporadic activity is also possible (United Nations Volunteers, 2001, pp. 3,4).
My volunteer work with UNV provided an interesting institutional contrast to the history of AVI and my own experience with it because of AVI’s historical emphasis on a careful balance between technical assistance and cross cultural exchange. UNV was also an IVCO but being part of UNDP, its historical priority had generally been more focused on high level technical skills and experience among its international volunteers but it was also different to AVI because the majority of its international volunteers were from the South. In addition, it complemented this work by supporting large numbers of ‘national volunteers’\(^7\) in the South. UNV’s specific history and approach is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

On return from Nicaragua, the interdisciplinary approaches introduced to me in my undergraduate degree, were consolidated through my Masters in Ecologically Sustainable Development including my dissertation *The Development of Voluntary Solidarity* (Devereux, 2002). This work consolidated my voluntary, work and study experience of how international volunteering provided a unique vehicle for approaching international development because of its relational focus on living and working alongside local people under local conditions. It was a subtly but quite significantly different approach from the way Community Aid Abroad had instilled in me the importance of local people doing development for themselves rather than relying on external ‘foreign advisers’ who did not understand the local reality and could impose an outside political or economic agenda. Given my dedicated commitment to international volunteering and Oxfam, it is a distinction I still ponder and discuss with others who

\(^7\) UNV facilitates national volunteer contributions via promoting volunteer infrastructure like government support and legislation but also through facilitating the provision of small locally calculated stipends and contracts for national volunteers usually with specific skills or experience and working on specific initiatives with formal contracts.
have experience in one or both of these areas. This comparison is further discussed in Chapter Three on development thinking.

While researching my Masters dissertation in 2002, I became aware of the work UNDP was doing that reviewed technical assistance approaches to development with a view to correcting the problems identified. This set in train a new emphasis on capacity development and aid effectiveness exemplified by the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD, 2005). The current state of development thinking and practice including these elements is discussed in Chapter Three.

**Conceptual frames for international volunteering**

The phrase ‘volunteering in cross national perspective’ was used by Salamon and Sokolowski (2001) to compare volunteer activity across different countries but more recently cross national volunteering has been used to describe “people travelling from one country to another to volunteer” (Davis Smith, Ellis, & Brewis, 2005, p. 64). Cross-national volunteering hence fits with international volunteering according to this definition and may be defined by identifying its five key characteristics: “geographical scale; function; direction; level of government involvement; and time scale” (Davis Smith, et al., 2005, p. 64). Within geographical scale considerations, cross national volunteering may be considered trans-national or international volunteering depending on the “degree of exchange and cooperation that takes place across national boundaries” (Davis Smith, et al., 2005, p. 64). McBride et al. (2003) suggest trans-national programs are: “cooperative programs between two or more countries, where the servers are expected to spend service time in a host country as well as their country of origin” while international programs “send people from the home country to other countries, or servers from different countries are sent to a single country” (pp. 10,11).
I now consider the characteristics of long term international volunteering for development, facilitated by independent agencies, using Davis Smith’s et al. (2005) five key characteristics. Considering geographic scale, international volunteers for development might be considered international because the IVCOs have generally sent people from their home country to other countries and this has typically been from North to South. However while volunteer sending agencies like Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) or UNV have headquarters in the North, UNV has for some time recruited 70% of its volunteers from the South and VSO, Progressio and other IVCOs increasingly also recruit volunteers from the South. Equally IVCOs emphasise the importance of volunteers taking the experience home to change perceptions about development at home. Progressio, VSO and Skillshare International have actively engaged returned volunteers in development advocacy like the Make Poverty History campaign. This advocacy activity on return home may not fit Sherraden’s (2001) definition of service as “an organised period of substantial engagement” (M. Sherraden, 2001) but would certainly be considered volunteering given Davis Smith’s et al. inclusion of advocacy in volunteering as discussed earlier. VSO and other IVCOs also increasingly look for opportunities to encourage exchange including bringing volunteers from the South into Northern settings, though admittedly it is not generally of the extended duration of most international volunteers for development working in the South. In this sense international volunteers for development mainly fit under the definition of ‘international volunteering’ but may also contain elements of ‘trans-national volunteering’.

In analysing ‘function’, independent IVCOs operate through individual volunteers contributing to locally identified specific development outcomes and capacity development but complementing this with an underlying emphasis on the volunteers’
personal development and solidarity through living and working under local conditions and engaging in cross cultural interaction, learning and linking. There is usually a specific level of technical skill and experience required (McBride, et al., 2003). UNVs, for example, usually have Masters degrees and 5-10 years experience while AVI volunteers commonly require a formal qualification of some kind and two years working in their field of expertise.

For definitional ‘direction’, international volunteers for development generally move North to South and increasingly South to South as well as in a comparatively small way South-East\(^8\) or North, but mostly still facilitated by organisations in the North\(^9\). VSO for example has recently emphasised and encouraged opportunities for gap year volunteers to come South-North as a counter to the increase in gap year and other volunteer tourism that has received some criticism (Simpson, 2004; Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006b). Global Xchange is a six-month exchange for young people, managed partly by VSO, which allows young people from the UK and developing countries to work together on community projects in both countries (Volunteer Service Overseas, 2006).

Regarding level of governmental involvement I have chosen to focus my research on IVCOs that are independent, in terms of governance from any one government or religious influence. A global assessment of the “forms and structure of civic service” identified from its sample that 92% of the international service programs were managed by voluntary agencies compared to 52% of national service programs that were operated by government agencies (McBride, et al., 2003). I have specifically excluded national government international volunteer cooperation organisations from my primary research.

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\(^8\) Former communist countries of Eastern Europe (as UNV and VSO do).  
\(^9\) One exception is Singapore’s International Volunteer Program (Krishna & Khondker, 2004).
because of strong political connotations that may accompany their discussion and consideration. Also excluded are missionary agencies that promote religious values along with development. This is not to suggest that there are not laudable institutions like the innovative Norwegian Government organisation Fredskorpsen or strongly religious organisations that also facilitate volunteers in positive ways. It is more an opportunity to narrow the research ambit and use my own institutional experience and emphasise a particular focus on civil society. I acknowledge however that no agency is completely independent, particularly when they are at least partly reliant on community, government, corporate or other sources for funding. The ‘independent’ agencies also have a community based governance structure or mandate and in the case of UN Volunteers the UN charter itself is the basis of its neutrality.

Time scale for international volunteers for development tends to be an extended period of one to two years duration though many agencies increasingly now also facilitate shorter term placements (Rockliffe, 2005). For the purpose of long term development interventions my research considers international volunteers who serve for at least one year in keeping with the common experience of groups like AVI, VSO, and UNV although long term international voluntary service has also been considered as greater than six months in duration (M. S. Sherraden, Stringham, Constanzo Sow, & Moore McBride, 2006, p. 165).

In keeping with this reflection on definition and IVCO common terminology, I use the term international volunteers to refer to long term, international volunteers working under local conditions\(^{10}\) in international development in the South and facilitated by

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\(^{10}\) Long term international volunteers usually receive some form of allowance to cover living costs and travel but these are usually in keeping with local pay norms for the developing country and well below Northern market rates though Rehnstrom (2000) criticised UNV conditions as too good.
IVCOs. VSO, AVI and UNV all use the term volunteer while the term ‘development workers’ is used by the British IVCOs Progressio and Skillshare.

To summarise the relevance of my experience, this thesis emerges from my reflective practice (Schon, 1983) as a domestic volunteer in a variety of local settings, a ‘volunteer for development’ in Nicaragua and Fiji, and ‘volunteer for development’ facilitator in Australia with Overseas Service Bureau/Australian Volunteers International, and with UNV in Fiji. My reflective practice has provided insights into volunteering and how it is defined and how volunteering is applied in development through IVCOS in the international development sector specifically not just in the NGO or ‘third’ sector more broadly. I have experienced first hand the motivation for volunteering and the ‘net cost’ approach to volunteering (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996). The ‘net cost’ approach suggests public views of volunteering are largely defined by the perceived total cost less the total benefits to the volunteer. Handy et al. (2000) found data supported this in five countries including one from the South namely South India. They noted however that public perception is more sensitive to the benefits an individual receives from volunteering than the costs incurred (p. 64). My ‘net cost’ volunteering experience is through:

- unpaid volunteer work for groups like the Social Responsibilities Commission and Community Aid Abroad/OXFAM; stipended volunteering for the SRC;
- volunteering during my annual leave to pick coffee in Nicaragua as part of an immersion program that I paid the cost of;
- full time international volunteer work at virtual total personal expense given the local Cordoba wage covered a minority of actual living costs and nothing of major costs like airfares;
• and finally full time international volunteer work where a basic stipend was provided along with airfares, and institutional support.

David Horton Smith (1981) defined a volunteer as someone engaging in behaviour that was not: “bio-socially necessitated”, “economically necessitated” or “socio-politically compelled” but instead motivated primarily by an “expectation of psychic benefits” from activities with “a market value greater than any remuneration received for such activities” (p. 23). On these grounds Smith regarded a Peace Corps volunteer with low skills but receiving expenses and a stipend as not so much a volunteer as a low paid worker. This seems a somewhat harsh assessment given it has been estimated that VSO volunteers working as volunteers for two years with local costs and local salary give up “five percent of their economically active life to service communities in developing countries” (Braham, 1999, p. 5). This apparent gulf between perception and reality is nevertheless a good example of the common emphasis on perceived personal benefits over personal costs of volunteering. It reflects the confusion if not animosity that I have encountered when talking about stipended international volunteers at Australian national volunteer conferences or other discussion settings where volunteering is primarily equated with unpaid good works11. Horton Smith compared the Peace Corps volunteer to a law school professor who foregoes lucrative private practice for an average academic salary who he said he would view as a quasi-volunteer. He contrasts both with a ‘pure’ volunteer who provides valuable assistance for no pay with the key distinction here being that despite presumably significant remuneration the skill set is very high and the remuneration is good but significantly lower than market rates. This assumes the Peace Corps volunteer is relatively unskilled, perhaps correct at time of publication but not now the norm for long term international volunteers.

11 Volunteering Australia for example explicitly states in its formal “Definition and Principles of Volunteering” that it is unpaid (Volunteering Australia, 2005).
Implicit in Horton Smith’s definition seems to be a priority on comparative lack of financial remuneration. This suggests pure voluntarism is providing valuable assistance for no pay which fits with a ‘grant economy’ rather than an ‘exchange economy’.

Horton Smith (1981) says “the essence of voluntarism is not altruism” (p. 24). He draws on Boulding (1973) to suggest when an individual gives something away in a ‘grant economy’ there is greater altruism because there is no expectation of a return of similar value unlike when operating in the “exchange economy” (D. H. Smith, 1981, p. 24).

The grant economy sounds on the surface not unlike the history of the international aid industry where aid has been articulated publicly as a simple principle of giving from rich countries to poor ones. Paradoxically however, the supposed grant economy has been criticised as really in practice being an exchange economy when one for example considers criticism of the tied aid system. In the tied aid system, despite apparent bilateral altruism countries have at times also engineered for themselves substantial trade and other financial benefits by virtue of what the aid money is spent on (OECD, 2008a; Sogge, 2002).

What the ‘grant’ versus ‘exchange’ distinction suggests is that popular images of volunteers have focused on specific individual service such as looking after the sick or elderly or ‘ameliorating individual problems and responding to people not politics’ compared to ‘activists who work for social change’ (J. Wilson, 2000, p. 216). However this is only one of many possible volunteer roles today. The evolution in perception, practice and philosophy of volunteers has meant greater recognition of a diversity of understandings about volunteering work (Cnaan, et al., 1996). These can now encompass reciprocity as well as ‘helping’, capacity development beyond charity, professionalism as well as meaning unskilled labour, at the same time as dealing with
causes and symptoms (instead of paternalistic help that creates dependence). This broader territory fits much more comfortably with the role of volunteers in development. The newer conception is broader like Davis Smith’s model (United Nations Volunteers, 2001). It critiques the grant model to consider its potential in the development sector to create paternalism and imposition. It reconceives the exchange model so as to exclude financial imperatives and instead to embrace learning and to encourage ownership and positive interaction. This analysis radically reshapes simplistic interpretations of potential international volunteer imperialism or colonialism in development practice and transforms them into a more radical and reciprocal people-centred relational development process.

One way to consider the new broader volunteer approach is to hear from a well known and respected humanitarian organisation and how they have defined volunteers in a people-centred way that encourages ownership and empowerment. The Red Cross is an organisation that specifically encourages volunteers of all kinds in its founding principles so it is an interesting case in point. In Mexico in 1983 the Red Cross had its first world meeting on voluntarism and defined a volunteer “as a person who reaches the consciousness of solidarity, leading him to work with people with the objective of wakening in them their own capacity to improve the quality of their lives” (Beigbeder, 1991, p. 104). This definition goes beyond the idea of a simple grant conception to one of solidarity. It encourages understanding and relating to others’ circumstances as a way to achieve mutual accountability, ownership and direction by those receiving assistance from a volunteer. This definition also emphasises the existing capacity of all people to improve their lives and that a volunteer assists through developing solidarity with them to achieve improvement. In other words, it helps bridge the gulf between giver and receiver, evident in the grant system, and moves more towards the non financial
exchange economy that can create a more understanding and horizontal relationship between them. This volunteer approach of solidarity might be seen as a positive/constructive way of bridging the divide Li (2007) identified between skilled people and those they work with who lack the same technical skills. This solidarity may then be seen as a bridge to responding to underlying causes not just symptoms and hence avoiding the potential paternalism of some forms of helping or care and instead encouraging justice (J. Wilson, 2000, pp. 216,217). So while ‘waking in others their own capacity’ can sound paternalistic it goes beyond a knowledge transfer mentality recognizing instead that capacity development fundamentally requires building on what people already know in terms of knowledge and experience. Such solidarity encourages empathy and ‘walking in others’ shoes’ in order to understand local contexts better. Solidarity also implies the reciprocal side of volunteers needing to learn and strengthen their own capacity and be challenged about their assumptions and even home country lifestyle expectations.

The Coordinating Committee for International Volunteer Service (CCIVS) in fact specifically distinguished between voluntary service and alternate social forms of social activities like benevolence and charity where benevolence or charity are considered to respond to symptoms of social problems not their causes and do not seek to change power structures and narratives. It aims at a strategy to: “eliminate the causes of alienation, create the conditions for the underprivileged to take charge of their own destiny, to advance beyond present conditions and build their own future on the basis of their own values” (Beigbeder, 1991, p. 104). Responding to causes not symptoms requires attention not just to local contexts but also power relations at a global level. These are reflected in but also go beyond the volunteer-host-local community relationships.
I have drawn inspiration from those who see volunteering as an opportunity to respond with solidarity and justice as above. I also use broad conceptual volunteer frameworks like that presented by Davis Smith (2005; United Nations Volunteers, 2001) and others like Cnaan et al. and Rochester (Cnaan, et al., 1996; Rochester, 2006) that are willing to see more nuanced interpretations of the word volunteer as a response to the much criticised ambiguity of definitions about who is a volunteer. I therefore also embrace for example the continuum that distinguishes between the “pure” and “broadly defined” volunteer notions that Cnaan et al. (1996) developed. These broader approaches provide the most inclusive approach to volunteering that does not exclude international volunteers as volunteers. These definitions do not fixate for example on “unpaid” work, instead they allow for consideration of remuneration less than the value of the work provided or what some have termed activities not primarily for financial gain (United Nations Development Programme, 2003; United Nations Volunteers, 2001, p. 3). The ambivalence of some in volunteer circles about using the word volunteer for long term international volunteers for development provides a useful foreground for the international volunteers’ parallel ambiguous recognition by the development sector as is discussed in Chapter Three, and also for the volunteer and stakeholder views in Chapters Five and Six. Two related discussions about to what extent international volunteers are volunteers and how they fit in the development sector are central to my research aims and questions because they relate to development, sustainability and volunteer theory as well as international volunteer characteristics, achievements and recognition. They are similar to some extent to what David Lewis (1999b) described as parallel universes between research on third sector activities in the North and South.
Intriguingly Colin Rochester (2006) draws a similar conclusion about the narrow and the broader volunteer frame in his volunteering literature review for the U.K. Commission on the Future of Volunteering. He says there is a straightforward view of the future of volunteering as unpaid service and says there is already reasonable consensus about what this requires and that “technocratic or managerial tools” can advance that. He contrasts this with what he says is a broader definition or view:

An agenda which takes full account of the other perspectives of volunteering as collective action, mutual aid and serious leisure is less clear-cut, broader and more contentious. It involves: making the case for alternative values (collective action and mutual aid vs focus on the individual; the value of experiential knowledge vs professional and managerial expertise; expressive as well as instrumental goals); research into the nature of participation in collective action, clubs, societies, and associations both face to face and via the internet (and the possible links between them); a greater emphasis on making organizations of this kind effective (on their own terms) rather than on the management of individual volunteers; an attack on unnecessary, inappropriate and disproportionate regulation which constrains and restrains voluntary action. (p. 35)

Rochester’s broader agenda for volunteering supports my view that while consideration and debate about volunteering for development has not been straightforward, it has actually foreshadowed similar key issues which face the broader volunteering agenda for the future and so is worthwhile and fertile ground for academic research (Perry & Imperial, 2001). While until now it has been rare, it has great potential and relevance for both the volunteering and development research and practice realms.

**The history of international volunteering**

Long term international volunteering in its formal sense began in the 1950s with the creation of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme at Melbourne University. Initially this fledgling endeavour, fuelled by the idealism, enthusiasm and solidarity of recent university graduates, was completely separate and independent of formal aid models and practice. However not all IVCOs had the same beginnings. For example, the US Peace Corps was set up with great fanfare by President Kennedy with government
backing. Over the years even international volunteering, facilitated by the independent IVCOs like AVI and VSO, has evolved to receive growing support from governments. Other donors and aid programs contribute more explicitly to technical assistance roles, with varying levels of independence and autonomy. These issues link directly to Rochester’s (2006) queries about the breadth of volunteer definition and there has been much debate during this history about:

1. Whether the cross cultural dimension of IVCO work through international volunteers was an appropriate priority for limited aid funds that might be better targeted at specific poverty reduction goals through more conventional technical assistance and other modes. This concern was raised mostly from large donors and government foreign affairs and aid departments although some development NGOs also saw it as better to direct funds to local development organisations and initiatives. It was also founded at times on the perception that volunteers were almost by definition largely unskilled. Connected with this:

2. Whether the support of international volunteers by international aid or foreign affairs budgets (and with a predominant focus on technical assistance) meant that in fact international volunteers were just part of a controlling and imperialist operation that paternalistically provided help or charity in favour of overarching Northern state interests. This issue was raised commonly, but rarely explicitly, by development NGOs and some development or voluntarism researchers and political activists.

Sherraden et al. (2006) suggest a typology for international volunteering that divides in two main categories. Firstly, it looks to distinguish international volunteering along the lines of service for international understanding or service for development aid and relief. Secondly, it divides on the basis of duration, nature of service and degree of
“internationality”. I accept that in broad terms this is an understandable and potentially useful distinction (for example between long term skilled volunteers and short term ‘volunteer tourism’) but I want to consider the implications of this dichotomy for conceptions of development. This dichotomy is particularly significant if it encourages a focus just on ‘development as practice’ and short term impact compared to long term change and social justice that also requires a broad vision for the future (Thomas, 2000). It implies that it is feasible to do international service for international understanding without an explicit development focus and this may be true. I do not however accept that it is possible to contribute to development without simultaneously encouraging international understanding and Sherraden herself powerfully recognises this in her book chapter on *International Civic Service: A step Toward Cooperation in a Global World* (2007). This research on the experience of international volunteers may shed some more light on this issue. It links quite directly to volunteer definitions and the validity of development as grant/aid/transfer or as exchange or interchange or interdependence. The dichotomy between volunteering for development or understanding is very pertinent when one considers reviews of the failure of technical assistance (TA) (as will be discussed in Chapter 3) or the transfers to, or education of, those in need, which does not build on local interest and knowledge and hence does not create the essential ownership for development. Reorientation to capacity development and the international agreements on the five Paris principles of ownership, alignment, harmonisation, managing for results and mutual accountability have seen some efforts to improve development responses.

The key issues of the thesis are centred on the transfer and ‘development as practice’ modes of development versus reciprocal and interdependent modes. The transfer and ‘development as practice’ mode is focused on efficient and practical transfer of skills,
capacity or catalytic work that does not expect or encourage the development worker or
volunteer to change, only the recipient of skills or local person involved with the
practical change or impact to be achieved. The reciprocal and relational model deepens
this by encouraging change and capacity development and practical improvement for
both partners and their contexts in the field and on return home. From this relational
perspective, the situation of one affects the situation of the other and so both need to
change themselves, including immediate local situations as well as broader structures
that perpetuate inequality and lack of sustainability. This also has the potential to
engender trust and agency for all involved encouraging, but not guaranteeing,
transformation beyond just instrumental approaches, reform or the status quo
(Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005; Lawrence, 2006).

Research aim
The research aims to investigate the characteristics, contributions and recognition of
long term international volunteers in development and sustainability thinking and
practice.

Research questions
The research pursues the above aim through four main research questions:

1. What is the current context for development theory and practice and how do the
   concept of sustainability, the IVCOs and their long term international volunteers
   for development and sustainability, fit into this setting?

2. What features characterise the role of long term international volunteers for
   development and sustainability?

3. Is it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers and/or
   others as a result of the work together?

4. How are international volunteers for development and sustainability recognised
   in the development sector?
Map of thesis

Chapter Two discusses how I went about doing the thesis which includes my attempt to maintain congruence in my approach to volunteering and be a reflective practitioner. It discusses my research methods including reflection and analysis of personal and professional experience; reviewing documentation and research literature; a six week email discussion hosted by United Nations Volunteers World Volunteer Web with participants in 80 countries; an email survey of 30 international volunteers across 16 countries; and interviewing 24 volunteer and 75 other stakeholders mainly in Central America and Cambodia.

Chapter Three, Development: From Technical Cooperation to Sustainability – A Relational Approach, elucidates the main focus of this thesis and examines the contemporary predicament of global development and ways to respond. It uses the idea of trans-national civil society, Ellerman’s (2004) idea of indirect and autonomy respecting assistance, social learning for sustainability and the Paris Declaration principles. It provides a theoretical basis for interpreting the volunteer and stakeholder responses to the questions presented in Chapters Five and Six through a relational view of development. This theoretical framework is largely based on development ideas rather than third sector or voluntary sector concepts because this is the main focus of the work of long term international volunteers for development. By comparison for example, ‘volunteer tourism’ more recently and volunteers in social welfare delivery at home are much more common reference points for volunteer research with more substantial research and documentation on them, partly, I suggest, because they are a better fit with the narrower definitions of ‘pure’ volunteering mentioned earlier.

Chapter Four builds on the discussion about the pertinent definitional, conceptual and historical issues of Volunteers, International Volunteers and the IVCOs begun earlier in
this chapter. This discussion allows a comparison of the work and conception of international volunteers for development as different from regular or national volunteer public discourse, particularly notions of ‘pure’ volunteers as unpaid and granting or transferring their expertise to others without it.

Chapter Five presents the results from the survey of international volunteers. The volunteer survey responses provide an opportunity to hear firsthand how volunteers see their roles, whether they have changed themselves or made a difference to people and situations they have volunteered in, and finally how they feel they are seen in the development sector. It provides a useful reality check against the current trends in development thinking and what this calls for, from Chapter Three as well as the specific IVCO goals, international volunteering history and concepts, from Chapter Four. This chapter provides an interesting juxtaposition between how volunteers see the potential development niche available, whether it fits IVCO expectations of the niche and finally how volunteers feel other stakeholders see them, which is compared with other stakeholders’ views in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six provides an opportunity to see and triangulate the perspectives of international volunteers obtained through the survey with interviews of other stakeholders mainly in Central America and Cambodia. The non volunteer stakeholder perspectives are presented based on research questions two, three and four in terms of how they characterize the volunteer role, what shifts they see in thinking and practice of volunteers and others and how volunteers are recognized in the development sector. These are then considered against their alignment with the relational basis of development, sustainability and volunteerism presented in Chapters Three and Four.
Chapter Seven concludes the thesis, bringing together the analysis of the answers to the research questions and aims. It provides an opportunity to see the ramifications of the research in terms of broader discussions of development, sustainability and volunteerism and particularly their current relevance. It then goes on to provide recommendations for IVCOs, donors and other development sector players along with recommendations for future research, drawing on the present experience. Finally the thesis closes with some personal reflections.
Chapter Two: Reflective practice – methodology and context

Introduction
This chapter maps how my standpoint and research aim are reflected in my choice of methods. I sought congruence between my personal and professional practice and values and that of international volunteering in general. I then explain the four specific methods: reflection and analysis of personal and professional experience, documentation and research literature; a six week global email discussion hosted by United Nations Volunteers World Volunteer Web; an email survey of international volunteers across 16 countries; and interviewing volunteer and other stakeholders mainly in Central America and Cambodia. I also link the research methods to specific research questions and the fieldwork context.

A reflective practitioner approach
My volunteer development practitioner experience was not an explicit scientific problem solving process but a practical experience of trying to make a concrete difference in an appropriate way guided by local needs and direction. International volunteers for development are at their best reflective practitioners who want to transform existing situations from what they are to something better. A volunteer has “an interest in understanding the situation but it is in the service of his [sic] interest in change” (Schon, 1983, p. 147).

What does it mean to be a reflective development practitioner? Kaplan (1999) says:

Development always, somewhere, assumes a preferred culture or value system, or way of doing things. This is implied in the very notion of intervening in others’ processes. We can mitigate this, but we will never get rid of it entirely, even when we operate out of an alternative development paradigm. (p. 12)
In other words as a reflective practitioner I am keen to make what I regard as a useful contribution drawing on my personal and professional experience and training. To do this I must be open to listen and adapt to different contexts and learn from them, recognizing my own standpoint as only one starting point.\(^\text{12}\)

Schon (1983) describes our standpoints or ways of looking at issues and problems as ‘frames’. It is clear we must explicitly recognise our own frames to see other possibilities and acknowledge the priority we have given them. He says:

> When practitioners are unaware of their frames for roles or problems, they do not experience the need to choose among them. …When a practitioner becomes aware of his frames, he also becomes aware of the possibility of alternative ways of framing the reality of his practice. He takes note of the values and norms to which he has given priority, and those he has given less importance, or left out of account altogether. (p. 310)

When we pay attention to the frames we see the importance of the development practitioner learning. Kaplan (1999) says:

> It is precisely because of our own unconscious projections and assumptions that we, as development practitioners, have to pay attention to our own development…. At the very least how can we possibly presume to intervene in others’ development if we do not understand our own, or if we are not prepared to engage in our own? (p. 13)

Reflecting on my own experience I am conscious that some people may see me as too biased and defensive as a former international volunteer and IVCO staff member to objectively consider the case for international volunteers. I therefore acknowledge and declare as part of the methodology my standpoint as a reflective practitioner. I am and have been shaped and influenced by the volunteer development work I have done. I, however, am also willing to critically view the frames within which I and others operate, as well as the practices and processes of peoples lived experiences of international volunteering. This is what I believe volunteering is about: contributing to

\(^{12}\)I am particularly conscious of this as a ‘privileged’ white middle class male from the North (Choules, 2007; Goudge, 2003)
change and reflecting on this change internally and externally. I have tried to be honest about my own frame in Chapter One.

My relatively long experience in overseas development practice allowed me to recognise the real constraints on a foreigner to blend in and understand fully the developing community reality. After 7 years in Nicaragua as an international volunteer working in local institutions, I still recognised my outsider status despite strong empathy and local integration and knowledge. I therefore fully recognise the genuine limitations on understanding how others think, when doing relatively superficial field visits and interviews. Initially, I felt quite uncomfortable with the comparatively detached role of researcher and the short time available to develop rapport with individuals in the field so that they would feel genuinely comfortable sharing what they really felt and thought. When volunteering I had had the luxury of years to do that! More than this, I felt profoundly uncomfortable with the lack of short term tangibly useful contributions that I could make. I had to settle for a keenness to genuinely listen and engage with the perceptions of all people—volunteers, hosts and other stakeholders as I spent time with them or interviewed them. The more I learnt, the more conscious I was of how much I did not know or was not able to fully appreciate, and yet I was grateful for the local insights and wisdom shared.

The epistemology of my research process is thus relational and participatory. It is relational in the sense advocated by Karl Manheim (1936) because I acknowledge and understand my culturally and socially specific relationship to my respondents and their communities. It is participatory because I wanted to develop shared knowledge through in depth discussions with them. I acknowledge the power relations and cultural

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13 To cite Schon (1983, p. 312), “Manheim and his followers have attempted to analyse how particular views of reality evolve out of the concrete situations of particular social groups, bearing the stamp of the perceived interests of those groups.”
differences that make participatory knowledge making problematic, indeed I believe this is what makes volunteers for development such an interesting research area.

I chose my methodology with three intentions: being consistent with a volunteer approach where my personal agency has an immediate political and societal impact (Yadama & Menon, 2003, p. 4); being consistent with a sustainability approach that seeks to integrate all individual elements into the larger whole; and being consistent with my epistemology as relational and participatory. It thus aims to be true to my vision of development where congruence in the areas of ‘personal behaviour, organisational norms and development objectives’ are responsive to the present dynamics of aid with regard to power, procedures and relationships (Chambers, Pettit, & Scott, 2001, p. 103). With this approach, concerns like social justice, autonomy and responding to underlying causes are as important as short term aid outcomes or treating symptoms. It also means the way development outcomes are achieved (process) is as important for long term development as the outcomes themselves. This demonstrates an approach that is not simply a means to an end but instead consistent between means and ends, not sacrificing one for the other or instrumentally using one as a mere tool to achieve the other.

My research questions relate to the value and meaning of volunteers’ work with local communities and the nature of relationships that emerge. These questions require careful and sensitive treatment to encourage open and genuinely respectful questioning and debate. For example respondents had to feel confident that their comments would be kept confidential so that they would not in any way be open to adverse effects locally as a result of being honest. Considerable effort was also made to make respondents comfortable with the researcher through prior dialogue or ideally in the case of the field
work meeting respondents in their workplaces or the field or neutral places like restaurants depending on what was most convenient for them not the researcher. It was also important to make clear to respondents that the research was not sponsored by any IVCO or donor so they were free to respond with candour.

Employing a qualitative interpretive methodology allows for the probing and in-depth investigation that can reveal deeper insights. Such research also required applying for permission from Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee which I obtained in 2004 prior to contact with research participants. The Ethics Committee approval was renewed on an annual basis until completion of the research in 2010. No significant ethical issues were encountered partly as a result of careful treatment, for example of privacy issues, which ensured that individual volunteers or small organisations could not be negatively affected by public knowledge of their views. The only drawback from this approach was that specific and at times highly recognised organisations or individual observers like ambassadors or key donors were not identified for privacy reasons, despite the positive credibility they would have provided to the research outcomes.

There has been over the last ten years an emphasis in the aid and development sector on development effectiveness and measurement of this in tangible ways (Australian Agency for International Development, 2005; OECD, 2005). This is to some extent an attempt to justify donor expenditures to their stakeholders or citizens, given these groups do not usually see directly the results of this effort overseas. Measurement of development effectiveness is often reflected in quantitative data collection and an emphasis on black and white definitions of problems and solutions rather than a willingness to embrace the ambiguity of many development contexts where separating
causal factors is difficult if not impossible particularly in the short term. There is also, as a result, a narrow definition of development outcomes in terms of economic or other narrow technical indicators. Even the millennium development goals (MDGs), which are important practical goals to achieve, in themselves can underrepresent the nuances and breadth of interrelated factors that are fundamental for understanding what is required to achieve meaningful development on the ground. The fact that ‘managing for results’ is only one of five Paris Principles on Aid Effectiveness is an indication of a growing acceptance that focus on impact or measurement alone is inappropriate in a development context (OECD, 2008c).

I am conscious of this from my experience with UNV in Fiji between 1999 and 2001 and our unsuccessful attempts to include the positive achievements of UNV in the Pacific, within the highly summarised Results Oriented Annual Reporting (ROAR) required by UNDP Headquarters. The UNDP headquarters ROAR template did not allow space for the sorts of accomplishments UNVs could report even though the local UNDP supervisor was also keen to include them. The methodology of this research is an attempt to capture more of the intangible but important elements of international volunteering for development.

My methodology is deliberately designed to evolve, genuinely respond to and integrate straight forward and latent elements of the work of international volunteers for development and sustainability. Engagement with the volunteer sector has been largely gained by attending and interacting within volunteer or voluntary sector conferences, meetings or discussions (where national volunteering was the main focus) and interaction with the development sector has been largely in the South where development not volunteering is seen as the main ‘game’.
My methodological approach utilises a range of different methods of information collection to gain both a broad understanding of different stakeholders’ general views and an in depth understanding through surveying, case studies from field work and reviewing documentation and correspondence from my own volunteer experiences. In this way I hope to create a fair representation of the experience of volunteers for development to generate an exploratory and pioneering study. I anticipate that many more specific research questions for future academic inquiries will be generated.

**Research methods**

The research process employed mixed methods to draw together the broad situation with regard to international volunteering for development and sustainability as opposed to a narrow detailed case study of one specific area or example\(^\text{14}\). The examples from Central America and Cambodia provide rich insights for the broader picture and there is merit in future narrower and more bounded case studies at a country or regional level but this is not attempted in this research. The literature search also was broad and continued throughout the process as both new sources and articles appeared as well old resources obtained as a result of networking within the sector. Equally, reflection on my personal experience of international volunteering has been a constant and integrated element of all techniques providing positionality and insights.

**Literature search and review**

Given the dearth of existing research material on long term international volunteering for development, it was important to first tentatively uncover and consider historical and contemporary writings on international volunteering. Then I wanted to link it to the

\(^{14}\) Multi-disciplinary and contextualised research were two elements identified as needing greater attention by Dr Justin Davis-Smith in his keynote address at the National Research Symposium on Volunteering, Melbourne March 2006.
volunteer and development sectors rather than see these two sets of literature as completely distinct and without overlap.

A small number of historical books and reports that documented the work of long term international volunteers were uncovered from the 1960s, 70s and 80s. These allow for interesting comparisons with documents from the 1990s and since 2000. Some of these were only uncovered beyond electronic literature searches and were the fruits of visits to libraries like the Australian National Library, La Trobe University library or some IVCO headquarters like UN Volunteers in Bonn, Skillshare International’s main office in Leicester, a VSO field office in Phnom Penh, the international volunteer section in AusAID Canberra and meetings or liaison with key volunteer researchers/institutes such as Dr Justin Davis Smith at the Institute for Volunteering research in London or Dr Amanda Moore McBride at the Centre for Social Development at Washington University St Louis Missouri.

**Engaging organisations and participants with the research**

Commencing the research required an entry stage of building trust and openness with international volunteer co-operation organisations. Suggesting the potential for mutual benefit (between researcher and volunteer agency) was real. I then moved that distant claim closer toward sharing information and gaining access to volunteer and other stakeholder experiences through personal and individual contact and meetings with volunteer sending agencies. Once this was achieved, I tried to do the same with other stakeholders suggesting the potential for mutual benefit with local volunteer host organisations/governments or donors. This process was important for uncovering material to explore in research question one as well as providing insights to assist interpretation of that same material and an entrée with IVCOs to address research questions two, three and four through surveys and field work. It was also particularly
useful to gain insights into research question four about how international volunteers are seen in the development sector.

My research focuses on the work of long term volunteers recruited by a selection of the main independent IVCOs which facilitate volunteers to work overseas for extended periods (commonly 2 years but increasingly also for shorter periods). For my research I have had contact with staff and volunteers from Australian Volunteers International (formerly Overseas Service Bureau), Austraining, Voluntary Service Overseas, Skillshare International, Progressio (formerly CIIR-ICD) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV)\(^{15}\).

Given my work/volunteer experience with them, both AVI and UNV were obvious choices to seek collaboration from for my research. I had inside knowledge, networks, understanding and appreciation of their practical approaches to international volunteering for development. After some negotiation, given I was now an ‘outsider’ of both these organisations, both agreed to collaborate with the research to some extent. Despite these agreements, it became clear that it would still not be easy to obtain significant data given limited numbers of international volunteers operating in environment related areas and moreover practical difficulties in getting information from volunteers and stakeholders. No IVCO embraced my suggestion to do ‘joint’ research which would have allowed more ownership and involvement of IVCOs in data collection and processing. It is however probable the data collected was less affected by agency bias or volunteer/stakeholder reluctance to be as frank, as they may have been if IVCOs were more directly involved in collecting and processing the data. As a result of limited response from volunteers contacted via AVI and UNV, an attempt was made to

\(^{15}\) UNV has been included as an ‘independent’ VSA because whilst not being an NGO, as a UN agency it is not controlled by any one government or foreign policy or missionary perspective.
then attract the collaboration of other IVCOs. I looked for organisations that would be similarly aligned in values and approach to development, have complementary experience/insights worth investigating and be willing to provide some entry point to their work and volunteers.

I sought to include a range of Volunteer Sending Agencies in my research as a way of minimising the risk of not getting sufficient research data. In my own IVCO work experience, (confirmed by the research experience and illustrated in quotes below and later this chapter in the section on the email survey), IVCOs were busy with the day to day running of their programs, and hence relatively inward looking and cautious about outside research requests. IVCOs are more responsive to internal short term processes and demands even if external requests had potential for long term benefits in documenting and improving the work or gaining more substantive recognition for the importance of their work. For example, one IVCO headquarter’s response came back:

Dear Peter, Thanks for your email and glad that your work is going well. As you may guess we are short of capacity to support your research with volunteers…(IVCO 4, 2005).

Part of the consideration for choosing other IVCO collaborators included a priority for organisations with AVI and UNV’s sense of independence even though one was an NGO and another a UN agency. AVI was an NGO and one that had at times taken firm independent stands regardless of government policy for example developing part of the international volunteer program outside Australia’s Asia Pacific priority area in Central America where I had volunteered. UNV was a UN agency and as such was avowedly non political and non religious.

VSO was a UK based NGO that I had heard about through my AVI work to have values similar to AVIs. Certainly its research and development of policy and strategy in the
late 1990s and after placed it clearly in the camp of an independent organisation that valued critical reflection and documentation of volunteering’s particular contribution to development (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2002). Through my web research I also found that VSO was one of the early IVCOs to prioritise work related to the environment, which it did through its livelihoods program.

Progressio was another UK based NGO I had encountered while volunteering in Nicaragua through meeting volunteers and staff. As part of my electronic research I had found Progressio to be conducting an environmental vulnerability program across Central America so it provided specific opportunities for my research if I could tap into their experience. Again I felt comfortable again with Progressio’s approach to volunteering and development (even if they called their volunteers development workers) which appeared similar to VSO, AVI and UNV. Progressio had also taken a strong international advocacy line for Nicaragua when Nicaragua was fighting for its independent development in the midst of cold war politics in the 1980s. This was in contrast for example to how the US government has controlled the Peace Corps since President Kennedy established it in 1961. Nicaragua for example did not see Peace Corps volunteers during Sandinista rule from 1979 until they lost the 1990 elections to the UNO coalition of 24 parties that the US government supported.

As part of my internet search for materials on international volunteers, I turned up an unpublished but thoughtful article on The Future of International Development Volunteering by Cliff Allum (2000). I discovered he was the director of Skillshare International another NGO with offices in Leicester UK and around the world. As a result of a visit to Skillshare International in Leicester and email followup, Skillshare agreed to circulate to its development worker volunteers an invitation to its
‘environmental’ volunteers to complete my survey. This had the added advantage of bringing some volunteer experiences from Africa into the study, given Skillshare’s strong presence and activity there.

Finally Austraining’s Youth Ambassador program was approached to provide input from its volunteers as a way of gaining insights from this program that uses younger volunteers for usually one year. It was also a fruitful program to include because of the support it gained from Australia’s former Coalition Government Minister for Foreign Affairs. Austraining is also the only “Managing contractor” IVCO in the research being the first non volunteer focused more commercially oriented organisation to conduct an international volunteer program from Australia. However even Austraining’s more corporate approach is clearly moderated by its parent being the South Australian government and therefore its public minded culture.

Throughout the research process there has been an attempt to enter into discussions where international volunteer issues could be discussed and canvassed. These opportunities for engagement, networking and discussion included presenting papers at the International Association for Voluntary Effort conference in August 2004, a Wollongong University Workshop on Volunteers and Security in the Asia Pacific region in November 2005 and the Australian National Volunteer Research Symposium in Melbourne in March 2006 (Devereux, 2006b). In 2006 and 2008 I presented at the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) Conferences as part of panels I organised on international volunteering (Devereux, 2006a, 2008b). Practical engagement with the issues through conferences, seminars and meetings with volunteer agencies and researchers near conference cities were a way of opening a space for
networking, discussion and feedback as well as encouraging some credibility for the topic and the researcher.

Academic conference engagement was complemented in 2008 by my success in having an article on international volunteering for development and sustainability in the development journal, *Development in Practice*. I was particularly glad to be able to publish in a development rather than volunteer journal because of firstly my view that international volunteering provides a particularly valuable insight to development thinking and practice and secondly because explicit consideration of international volunteering in development journals is much more rare than it is in volunteer publications. This directly reflects how volunteering has been commonly categorised and this is something my research challenges.

**Global email discussion**

A global email discussion was moderated in collaboration with United Nations Volunteers as a second means of gaining recognition and openness in the international volunteer for development sector as well as providing open opportunities for people from outside the sector to share criticisms, comments and experiences of the international volunteer sector.

In late 2004 over ten weeks from October 8 to December 15, I moderated the online email based discussion forum on the topic: “What’s so special about volunteers? Volunteers and environmental sustainability”. I did this to strengthen networking with volunteers and volunteer agencies, provide background and context for subsequent research activities and encourage frank and informal input and discussion from volunteers and development practitioners regardless of their situation, location or affiliation. While not overall focused on international volunteers the forum did touch on
this topic as well as bring out significant issues related to experts, technical assistance, development and attitudes to volunteering amongst diverse stakeholders (as is reflected in the breakdown of participants). These insights provided very useful background particularly for later understanding and appreciation of diverse stakeholders in the field.

The Speakers Corner on The World Volunteer Web that promoted the discussion was set up by UNV in partnership with the International Association for Volunteer Effort, Merrill Associates, and One World. United Nations Volunteers organised the technical platform for the email discussion through Dgroups, a joint initiative of Bellanet, DFID, Hivos, ICA, IICD, One World, UNAIDS and The World Bank. The discussion attracted a remarkable 672 participants in 100 countries and six continents—clear evidence of interest in the topic.

As moderator it was my role to stimulate broad discussion on the topic. This was also an opportunity to encourage specific reflection on my research area where feasible. The discussions can be grouped into 6 main areas as follows:

- Role of volunteers and awareness of their contribution among policy makers and environmental activists;
- volunteering for environmental sustainability from the perspective of rich and poor;
- volunteer motivations;
- community’s roles and attitudes to local and or international volunteers working for environmental sustainability;
- volunteers/experts and the transfer of technical skills and knowledge for environmental sustainability; and
• Governments and institutions’ facilitating volunteer involvement in environmental sustainability programs through appropriate laws and policies.

Membership was open to anyone, anywhere with email access. Despite this open opportunity, there was an obvious reliance on computer and email access which would have skewed membership to better resourced people despite the positive broad geographic spread of participants across North and South. Members who signed up via the world volunteer web were first encouraged to introduce themselves over the first week before the discussions were officially begun with the first of 6 discussion starters I as moderator sent around to the gradually growing member group. From those members who introduced themselves (this was optional), the following geographic areas were represented: 29 African countries, 17 Asian countries, 9 Middle Eastern countries, 3 countries of Australia/Oceania, 23 European countries, 8 Caribbean and Central American countries, 3 North American countries and 9 South American countries. An online feedback survey of members at the conclusion of the email discussion was completed by 94 members of whom 56% were women. These participants described their professional background as NGO (43%), Intergovernmental agencies like UN, EC, Development Banks 19%, Academia (10%), Student (10%), Private sector (8%), Government (7%), Donor Agencies (1%), Media (1%), Faith based (1%). Email addresses of the members indicated 20 members were from UNV and 30 from other UN agencies.

Email survey

To directly canvas international volunteers and volunteer host organisations about research questions two, three and four, I asked a range of IVCOs for assistance with survey distribution.
The detailed survey and interview questions that arise from the research aim and questions, were developed to frame the scope of the research on the current development context, in the light of historical development theory, trends and debate, and thus be able to ascertain the relevance of international volunteering for development and sustainability (with insights from volunteer theory, trends and debate).

As a result there was an effort to:

1. Research and synthesise development, volunteer and international volunteer theory research and practice

2. Ascertain from diverse stakeholders key features of international volunteers for development and sustainability to see how they responded to the context synthesised in 1. above and

3. See if and how these features were reflected by the actual experiences of international volunteers and those they worked with.

4. Finally it was felt crucial to get direct insights from the development sector broadly on how they saw international volunteers in terms of role and practice. Ie to get actual evidence from donors and other non volunteer stakeholders on what they saw as international volunteers’ relevance for development practice. This was an effort to genuinely appraise the real role international volunteers are considered to play compared to an aspirational contribution that was not seen as welcome or particularly useful, as appears at times the subtle view of some non volunteer stakeholders in the development sector (as is discussed in Chapter Four).

The questions in the survey and interviews were thus designed to draw out real practical examples of international volunteer experiences from diverse angles. While the survey only included volunteer perceptions of others views (with examples) the interviews were directly able to canvass the views of host organisations where the volunteers worked and others that might have seen their work because of crossing paths with them.

This included for example donors working on related projects, an ambassador from their country of origin or another who had seen or heard of their work, or an NGO, community representative or individual directly or indirectly affected by the work.

Survey and interview questions were specifically designed to give respondents the opportunity to give positive or negative evidence. For example in asking about
achievements stakeholders were asked “what kinds of achievements are difficult to achieve with the help of an international volunteer/development worker that other forms of aid would be more successful with?”.

I commenced the request to survey international volunteers through Australian Volunteers international and UN Volunteers but gradually, given the limited response, extended the survey request beyond this to Skillshare International, Austraining’s Youth Ambassador Program and once I gained assistance from the local Cambodian field office, VSO. Through each agency I was able to send a one page summary of the research with a request for interested volunteers to contact me so I could send them the survey form. The volunteer form also sought contact details for host organisation people who may be able to also complete a survey form. Australian Volunteers International sent the request initially in July 2004 to 50 volunteers and 56 returned volunteers (who had been back for less than three years), whom they had coded as being in environment related fields. From this I received 11 email responses of which 7 completed the survey form. UNV environment focal point in its headquarters in Bonn sent the survey request to 132 UNV focal points in UNV units &/or UNDP offices around the world asking them to send the request on to local UNVs. In response 11 emails were received, of which 5 were from individual UNVs working in environment related areas (others were UN staff commenting on lack of UNVs in this area or providing their own summary information about UNV achievements) and 3 completed the survey.

The research summary that accompanied the initial email request to complete the survey, had spoken specifically not just of people working in environment related areas but canvassed them as ‘scientists’ using Stocker’s criteria from her discussion of community science. She described scientists in this context as people who use
techniques that follow “systematic investigation of patterns, processes and events in the natural, modified or built environment, and uses techniques that produce reliable, accurate and useful outcomes” (Stocker, 1995:549). One volunteer immediately excluded herself from the research on that basis saying:

*Hi Peter, I am working in sustainable development, but certainly not a scientist and not using scientific techniques that follow systematic investigation to produce reliable, accurate and useful outcomes!!!*

*But good luck with your work! Cheers...* (CAM RV1 - Natalie, 2005)

Another sought clarification before agreeing to be involved:

*Hi Peter, I started to fill in the survey and noticed the questions refer to volunteer ‘scientists’, I am not a scientist – my background and qualifications are in social science, environmental planning and communications. Does this change things? Thanks.* (AVI RV4 - Ruth, 2006).

Information sent to volunteers soliciting their involvement had specifically stated that qualifications in the natural sciences were not essential but the feedback was taken as indicative of the broad technical skill set and the practical rather than ‘scientific’ perception of the environmental outcomes to be achieved. As a result of this feedback, the research omitted the term scientist in subsequent surveying to ensure the inclusion of volunteers who were involved in skilled environment related work even if they were not natural scientists. Indeed the broader research orientation was widened to acknowledge that many volunteer professionals are involved in environment related work from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds. A copy of the initial and revised research survey questions are attached (in Appendices One and two). Given the small response to the initial pilot survey using ‘scientist’ terminology, it was felt worthwhile to maintain the responses in the overall survey data with a perceived gain of respondents with only a small loss of breadth in respondents not an inappropriateness of those who did respond.
In May 2005 Skillshare International sent the survey request to 12 in country or returned development workers (their term for international volunteers) in environment related fields of whom 4 in country volunteers responded and all completed the survey. The request was re-circulated to the Australian Volunteers International overseas environment related volunteers in August 2005 with 7 email responses of which 6 completed a survey form. In November 2005 Austraining agreed to send the survey to environment related youth Ambassadors and 14 responded of which 6 completed the survey. Despite not being able to negotiate a way to circulate the survey via VSOs head office, after visiting the VSO field office in Cambodia in September 2005, the VSO livelihoods officer agreed to circulate the survey request to their livelihood volunteers in Cambodia. Of the 15 volunteers who were emailed the survey request, 5 responded, 2 completed the survey and all 5 agreed to meet me in country for an interview in January/February 2006 when I was to be there for further field work.

Possible reasons for the poor response to the survey were:

- detached nature of international email request compared to a personal approach;
- action focus rather than documentation focus for volunteering;
- limited number of volunteers working in an environment related sector;
- some recipients in the pilot stage may have excluded themselves from the research because of a perception they did not classify as “scientists’;
- limited ownership for the research by volunteers because of receiving the survey second hand via their IVCO rather than directly from the researcher due to privacy reasons although this agency ‘endorsement’ might have been considered a positive factor;
• difficulty with survey participant follow-up without names and contact details again because of privacy legislation precluding the IVCOs from giving out volunteer contact details directly.

The invitation from VSAs for volunteers to complete the survey resulted in 30 volunteers or former volunteers responding individually during or after assignments in Indonesia, China, Papua New Guinea, Eritrea, Thailand, Cambodia, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Indonesia, Malawi, Mongolia Nepal, Samoa and Sri Lanka. The surveys were input into QSR NVivo software and coded to allow more effective data management and analysis. Participants were initially prior to analysis given a numeric name to ensure anonymity and neutral assessment. This was later converted to a random name reflecting their gender but not their identity, for inclusion when cited in Chapters Five and Six.

Analysis of both email survey and fieldwork data was done with the assistance of QSR NVivo software. Fundamentally the software assisted in two ways: firstly allowing the systematic storing, organisation and reorganisation of texts and documents; and secondly the creation and organisation of coding (Gibbs, 2002). Together these features enhanced the capacity to search systematically for patterns (R. B. Lewis, 2004, p. 451). The software did not replace the value of becoming very familiar with the data (through reading and re-reading of the texts) and their context as reflected and documented in my field work journal. NVivo made the process of retrieving information quicker and simpler but also can make qualitative analysis “easier, more accurate, more reliable, and more transparent” (Gibbs, 2002, p. 105). The software was also invaluable in helping conduct content analysis for example classifying the textual material obtained from
email surveys and interviews and arranging it into more relevant and manageable chunks of data (Weber, 1990).

NVivo allows coding of data into three basic forms as:

1. free nodes (in other words codes or themes that do not immediately appear related to other codes in the project);
2. tree nodes (in other words grouping of codes or themes that are organised into a formal hierarchical relationship) and
3. case nodes (in other words codes that help organise details and characteristics of individual cases or units of analysis) (R. B. Lewis, 2004).

Tree nodes were set up to cover the key research question themes and then I created new levels under these as sub themes emerged from respondents. Where it was not clear what would be an appropriate tree node to place coded text under, a free node would be created to allow time for consideration of significance (if the theme emerged also from more sources) and possible location or challenge to existing structure and hierarchy of the themes. As the data were read and re-read significant free nodes became tree nodes allowing patterns and relationships to become clearer. Whenever possible respondents own terms were used in node names but if a generalised term did not emerge one would be created.

A number of steps were taken to ensure thoroughness in analysis starting with text searches which were completed using NVivo to ensure that all responses related to key themes were coded. NVivo would provide the locations of documents containing that text which could then be coded by theme. Searches like that were included in the regular log of analysis activity in NVivo. The regular log included a record of tasks completed, reflections on the data and themes that were emerging and suggestions for further analysis. It was reviewed prior to each new analysis and when writing up began.
After completing significant amounts of coding, the data were used to compile tables for easy access and understanding. Tables demonstrated more clearly key emerging themes and their comparative significance for example sorted between different stakeholders such as volunteers, hosts and other stakeholders (which were differentiated by case nodes). Use of case nodes allowed careful separation of data from groups with different attributes for example volunteers or other stakeholders. This was a crucial distinction to objectively test the similarity and differences between responses from the two groups (ie material discussed in Chapter Five from volunteers and material in Chapter Six from other stakeholders) but the attribute summary report (of the case nodes) also provided very useful summaries of respondent characteristics in number terms.

Once it appeared that all sub themes of a given node had been identified, text searches were conducted again to ensure thoroughness. Some of this material is reproduced directly in the appendices. The detailed tables were used to ascertain priority of themes raised by respondents and discussed in Chapters Five and Six. The diversity of sub modes was periodically reviewed to allow merging of similar nodes and thus more simply reflect key trends. However the significant diversity of sub themes discussed in Chapters Five and Six demonstrate the nuanced responses of different stakeholders in different contexts.

From the NVivo coding major themes and linkages were identified and/or confirmed. The country, facilitating IVCO, host and gender breakdown of survey participants is in table 1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Facilitating IVCO*</th>
<th>Host**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Botswana</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>SK</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2VSO, 1YA, 2UNV,</td>
<td>4 Govt, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1AVI,</td>
<td>Proj, 1 UN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1AVI, 1YA</td>
<td>2 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 UNV</td>
<td>1 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 AVI</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4 AVI</td>
<td>3 NGO, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 SK</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malawi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 AVI</td>
<td>1 Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 YA</td>
<td>1 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 SK</td>
<td>1 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 AVI</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.N.G.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 AVI</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 AVI</td>
<td>1 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1YA, 1AVI</td>
<td>1 NGO, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Proj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swaziland</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1SK</td>
<td>1 NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 AVI, 2 YA</td>
<td>3 Govt, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NGO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks and Caicos Is.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 UNV</td>
<td>1 Govt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>** Totals</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


** Field work

The field research deliberately sought to engage with respondents and their community, seeking feedback and being open to unplanned inputs and emergent outcomes. Non
volunteer stakeholders were sought out for the research using the snowballing technique (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981) using international volunteer host organisations, donors, international volunteers and other representatives from development organisations as appropriate referral points. Just being in the field presented many unplanned and informal opportunities to speak with community members or other observers that provided an opportunity to organise later follow up interviews, even if they were initially reluctant to talk or too busy. Two different visits to Cambodia for example provided an opportunity to canvass widely possible interviewees and return to interview them on the later visit.

Discussion on international volunteer issues evolved freely in a semi structured but flexible format based on the questions of the email survey. Many respondents embraced the challenge with candid and fruitful insights. Because of the breadth of meetings and interviews, some became most useful as broad contextual insights and for relationship building to strengthen trust and understanding for participation in the research by organisations, communities and individuals. Other interviews of meetings proved more directly pertinent to specific research questions. As a result it was only considered necessary to transcribe in detail meetings and interviews that contributed directly to the narrower research aims, and these were the ones that were input to NVivo for more detailed analysis.

a. Central American field work and interviews

The aim of field work in Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador was specifically to see firsthand a relatively rare combination of an explicitly environmentally focused program that incorporated long term international volunteers. The field work provided a direct opportunity to canvass research questions two, three and four with non-volunteer stakeholders and hence see if their responses were different to those collected from
volunteers in the email survey. The direct and on the ground field work gave an opportunity to see volunteers and other stakeholders in context and hence in an environment that allowed some triangulation of research question responses between different observers and from my own observation. Progressio’s program was focused on “Strengthening the capacity of civil society to reduce environmental vulnerability in El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua”. Most IVCOs have not generally chosen to focus in a programmatic way across the environment sector choosing more commonly for example the health or education sectors although the VSO livelihoods program is another exception. The Central American field work provided me with an opportunity to utilise my understanding of the Central American culture, environmental context and my Spanish language skills, to conduct interviews directly with people in the dominant language. An initial quote from an interview was used directly in text in Chapter Six with an English translation in the footnote and subsequently English in the text and Spanish in the footnotes. The inclusion of the original Spanish in the footnotes is a reminder to the reader of the important cultural messages enmeshed in language that must be sensitively appreciated to understand and interact in varied development contexts.

I spent two weeks in each country flying into Managua on 28 January and then bussing my way across Nicaragua then up through Honduras and El Salvador, flying out of San Salvador on March 10 2004. In Nicaragua I had meetings in the capital Managua along with field visits to program sites in Esteli, Condega and Nueva Segovia for interviews and meetings. In Honduras I had meetings in the capital Tegucigalpa and made field visits to interview volunteers and host organisations/communities in Tela and Gracias. Finally in El Salvador I visited program sites in Chalatenango and San Miguel and had meetings and interviews in San Salvador as well as being able to attend a workshop
conducted with volunteers and host organisations involved with the environmental vulnerability program at a national level. In each country I was able to speak to Progressio representatives about the program and volunteers as well as other stakeholders ranging from donors to NGO and multilateral agency representatives or members of local communities. It is important to note however that while I used international volunteer interviews to triangulate evidence of other stakeholders, Chapter Six presents and analyses only non volunteer respondents to assess how their views compare with volunteer views from Chapter Five.

In Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador the research focus was on volunteers and other stakeholders in the Progressio initiated project to reduce environmental vulnerability. This project had international volunteers\(^{16}\) networked within local organisations across the three countries as an enduring response to the devastation of Hurricane Mitch in 1998 and an attempt to help counter the environmental vulnerability factors that made its effects so severe. Hurricane Mitch caused over 10,000 deaths and US$5 billion dollars damage in the three countries. After hurricane Mitch, Progressio staff and Central American partners agreed on a coordinated and integrated approach to tackle the long term issues of environmental vulnerability. Hence the project was created and the British National Lottery Community Fund agreed to cover its costs (CIIR-ICD, 2001, p. 4).

In CIIR-ICDs Latin America and Caribbean Strategic Plan there were four priority themes: Civil society and citizen participation, Gender equity, Ethnic diversity and identity and Environment with the goal of rational natural resource use and management and the protection of the environment for the improvement of the quality of life of poor

\(^{16}\) Interestingly out of nine key international volunteers in the project three were from Europe and six from Latin America demonstrating in practice the increasing tendency to recruit volunteers from the South.
urban and rural communities. The Central American environmental vulnerability project works towards CIIR’s environmental priority theme, while strengthening civil society organisations to promote better management of natural resources and contributing to greater gender equity (CIIR-ICD, 2001:5).

b. Cambodian field work and interviews

Rather than focus on a single case study, the aim of field visits in Cambodia was to see firsthand the work of long term international volunteers for development in context and speak to them and other stakeholders about their work and contribution. As with the Central American field work, it was a particular opportunity to canvass directly research questions two, three and four. It was also possible in Cambodia to follow up on some emailed surveys with local site visits and discussions, in a context where technical assistance was topical, even controversial\(^{17}\), and conventional aid was very conspicuous in terms of aid projects/programs and personnel. As a result, Cambodia provided an interesting site for a contrasting discussion of the volunteer niche. Cambodia is also a country where Australia has a historical and ongoing link through aid flows, former refugees, and diplomatic ties.

Interviews were conducted in Cambodia with AVI, Youth Ambassador, VSO UNV volunteers and other stakeholders ranging from diplomatic representatives including an ambassador, donor representatives, UN agencies like FAO, UNDP, NGOs and government managers and staff or former volunteers. A major focus of the Cambodian field work is related to the Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project (TSEMP) component 2 which has involved VSO volunteers as part of an Asian Development Bank project mainly supporting community fisheries with technical assistance from FAO.

\(^{17}\) Hun Sen the Cambodian Prime Minister has made various frank and critical assessments of the technical assistance contribution of foreign donors to Cambodia, in the UN and other fora.
A number of IVCOs responded to Cambodia’s environmental challenges with a range of Australian volunteers, youth ambassadors, UNVs and other volunteers operating in this sector. However, VSO is the agency that has done this most systematically through its livelihoods program. Within Cambodia interviews were conducted with a range of stakeholders to get varying perspectives on volunteer contributions ranging from donor to diplomat, NGO, UN agency, academic and government. Some of these people had been hosts for volunteers’, others, funders, others, observers or people who had worked with the volunteers.

An initial visit to Cambodia was used to make contact with AVI volunteers and UN Volunteers and pursue possibilities for further volunteer contact. During a week long visit to Phnom Penh in October 2005, interviews were conducted with volunteers, co-workers/host organisation representatives and with other organisations like donors/NGO representatives. Through this October 2005 visit, agreement was also reached with the local VSO office to make contact with VSO volunteers working in the Livelihoods area in Cambodia. It had proved difficult to negotiate this via email contact and a visit to the Central VSO Office in London but the local office staff were very responsive and amenable. With assistance from the VSO Cambodia office, VSO volunteers were asked if they would fill in a survey form and/or do an interview as part of a visit to them in the field. From a request to 15 volunteers, two completed a survey form and seven including these two agreed to a field visit from me to interview them and people they worked with. As a result, individual field visits were made to VSO volunteers, hosts and other stakeholders in Phnom Penh, Battenbang, Pursat, Kampong Chhang and Siem Reap between January 20 and February 16 of 2006.
Interview content and context

Interviews followed the themes of the research questions and survey form but were kept open and flexible depending on responses received to the open questions and the time that host representatives had available. Interviews in Cambodia were all conducted in English (and all in Spanish in Central America) and for questions with host organisation co-workers or representatives generally an introductory period was spent with the volunteer present initially to break the ice followed by a private interview with the local host person. Interviews with some volunteers and hosts were accompanied by visits to work sites of half to one day by foot, motorbike or boat or frequently a combination of all three. One community fishery site visit with a VSO volunteer in Battembang involved a two hour motorcycle journey and two hour trudge through mud and water a metre deep, on the edge of the Tonle Sap lake. A visit to Kampong Trucek with another VSO volunteer to observe an emerging ecotourism venture, required a three hour boat trip interrupted by a 45 minute stoppage half way into the journey on the Tonle Sap lake, because of bad weather and the need for a stronger and larger boat to complete the journey.

VSOs Livelihoods Program Area Plan 2004-2009 aims to: “improve the livelihood security of poor and disadvantaged women and men who are dependent on fishery and forest resources in the Tonle Sap Lake provinces and the Mekong provinces in North East Cambodia” (2004, p. 1). The stated program objective is to: “improve the effectiveness and responsiveness of services provided by government, non government and community based fishery and forestry organisations to poor and disadvantaged women and men” (Volunteer Service Overseas, 2004:1). The plan says: “particular emphasis will be given to supporting the process of community involvement in natural resource management” (Volunteer Service Overseas, 2004:1).
Cambodia is an interesting case to consider because of the significant poverty there combined with a relatively large number of international volunteers and an important historical contribution dating from before the prominent international volunteer involvement to help facilitate the UN organised elections in 1993. Their contribution in the context of technical assistance is also worth reflecting on because of some very public debate about the failings and inequalities of conventional technical assistance in Cambodia.

For example Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen emphasised the importance of mutual respect and ownership in development partnerships and complained to the General Assembly in 2005 about the political undercurrents of aid and technical assistance that did not respond adequately to local priorities and consultants who did not understand local realities (H. Sen, 2005).

Action aid agreed with his assessment when they stated in their ‘Real aid’ report (2005):

In Cambodia the aid spent by donors on 700 international consultants in 2002 was estimated to be between US$50 and US$70m – roughly equivalent to the wage bill for 160,000 Cambodian civil servants. In other words, donor-financed consultants working in the Cambodian government are paid upwards of 200 times what their Cambodian counterparts receive. (p. 22)

**Congruent, reflective and relational practice**

I have sought in my research methodology to embody the value of building relationships of trust, understanding, mutual learning and respect, in an attempt to be congruent with my values and those of international volunteering in general. The fieldwork has been undertaken consistent with the principles of living and working alongside people of developing communities under similar conditions, rather than living separate to or above them at a more ‘international level’. For example, where possible, I
used accommodation provided by friends/volunteers or local communities rather than separate commercial lodgings and when commercial accommodation was required it involved simple accommodation. I chose ‘local’ modest forms of transport for example, walking or local buses or cycle rickshaws over individually contracted research vehicles. When possible, I just accompanied local people or volunteers as they would normally travel.

Many international volunteers helped me make sense of local bus routes and fares and one volunteer encouraged me to join him walking alongside his wheelchair as he braved the peak hour traffic of a busy Asian city. This field work practice was a genuine attempt to blend in and be dependent to some extent on local norms and practices, rather than come in as well resourced or completely independent and hence, to some extent a detached, researcher. It was also of course responding to the real limited resources available for my research, which may be a reflection of the level of priority and funding afforded research in international volunteering generally. Having said this, a small grant obtained via Global Service Institute did allow payment for airfares and basic research costs for overseas field research, which would have been almost impossible otherwise.

The field work practice was also an explicit attempt at all times to engage with local people and volunteers in a genuine way that was actually responsive to their agenda and concerns rather than simply following an external and fixed research agenda or themes. To allow this I was guided by volunteers and their host institutions on timing and activities when visiting them. This required improvising and adjusting my scheduled program to take advantage of special opportunities or to adapt to last minute changed circumstances and be patient and accept that my agenda was not the most important one for local people and institutions.
**Personal reflection and documentation**

I have already discussed the fact that I am situated as a reflective practitioner in my research. To complement this implicit recognition of international volunteer for development grounding, I also seek to provide some direct insights from my own volunteer experience via correspondence and other publications or documents that I have retained copies of (or had passed back to me by my parents) since my initial period volunteering in Nicaragua. These range from a few official reports, magazine articles or letters to Australian Volunteers International, to extensive correspondence to my family in Australia during my volunteering period overseas\(^{18}\). The personal reflections and documentation ground my consideration of research question one as well as my approach to obtaining data on research questions two, three and four.

**Limitations**

The survey through IVCOs obtained information only from international volunteers, even though it was hoped originally to also engage partner organisations. Also, as discussed earlier, the response rate to the email survey of volunteers was quite low. The subsequent field work interviewed some volunteers who had not returned email surveys and while their data was not included in other stakeholder views reflected in chapter 6, their views were consistent with email survey themes. Future joint research with an IVCO directly collecting data and without a sectoral narrowing as in this study would allow a larger sample to be collected. The international email discussion on volunteers and sustainability encouraged and provided great discussion but gained insights mainly from volunteers and organisations engaged with volunteers at a national level (rather than with international volunteers). As such the results are not directly analysed in the research but used more as a grounding for how to tackle and focus the research and an opportunity to build trust and understanding in the sector so that IVCOs would be more

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\(^{18}\) See for example (Devereux, 1992, 1994, 1997; Devereux & Courneyeur, 1994)
receptive to allowing ‘their’ volunteers to be involved. The UNV discussion summary is included in Appendix 3. Field work provided an opportunity to delve more deeply into a range of actors’ perceptions and particularly provided an opportunity to see how things looked from the development side of the equation be that local organisations hosting international volunteers or communities interacting with volunteers, development agencies, donors and international volunteers directly. However, the direct nature of the interaction with local people may have been difficult for some respondents. When the introduction to other stakeholders was through the volunteer it may have influenced some responses despite the volunteer’s absence from the interview. It was however always explained to non volunteer stakeholders that their views were confidential and would not be attributed to them publicly through the research without their express wish.

Conclusion
In conclusion this thesis is grounded in a relational approach that remains systematic and evidence based in its methodology. To facilitate this the thesis uses reflective practice combined with specific tools to cultivate exploration and mapping of the context for international volunteering for development and sustainability. It does this through my personal and professional experience as well as other techniques to elicit trust, understanding and information that shed light on the research aim and questions. My personal and professional experience was used as a launching pad and grounding for the research that was complemented by the literature search and review which was enhanced by liaison, networking and conferencing, drawing on personal reflection and documentation and an early and free ranging email discussion on volunteering and environmental sustainability. These clarified issues and provided outsider perspectives that helped the development of effective approaches for the research. They also provided a strong basis for the more specific research tools of the volunteer survey and
field work interviews. The results of the volunteer survey provided a point of reference on key issues that could then be used as a basis for considering central characteristics of international volunteers and the shifts in thinking and practice they achieved and their recognition by non volunteer stakeholders. Together the research methods assist the investigation of the characteristics, contributions and recognition of long term international volunteers in development and sustainability thinking and practice along with the individual research questions that emerge from this. Chapter Three focuses on research Question One by reviewing the current context for (sustainable) development theory and practice and the relevance of long term international volunteers for development and sustainability.
Chapter 3: Development – from technical cooperation to sustainability: A relational approach

Introduction
This chapter examines historical and contemporary views of development, poverty and sustainable development and critiques some of the problems and opportunities. I ponder whether technical solutions and poverty reduction, as important as they are, are insufficient to achieve the millennium development goals (MDGs). I consider questions of inequality and call for collaborative approaches that embrace complexity, common ground and accountability between experts and citizens to achieve transformational approaches to sustainability and development. This critique leads us to a relational view of development and provides a glimpse of some crucial elements of that view, as a precursor to exploring in Chapter Four how long term international volunteers may fit that niche and reiterate its importance.

This chapter thus sets the scene for considering international development and sustainability. I use as a starting point the rationale and agenda for aid and development that US President Truman laid out in his famous 1945 speech. I briefly consider development theories and focus on the role technical assistance (TA) has evolved to today including the new emphasis on capacity development. I argue for a broader meaning of development as satisfying human needs and aspirations within ecological constraints. From this perspective, development is broader than a single minded pursuit of poverty reduction and includes a fundamental concern for the viability of the planet and the interaction among individuals, communities and ecosystems to make that sustainable. As part of this broader conception, I discuss the shortcomings of a simple North-South focus for poverty reduction. Rising international and intra-national
inequality, environmental degradation and conflict demonstrate the importance of all people discovering meaning through interactive relationships that go beyond goals within a conventional technical cooperation framework. Such an interactive space allows an opportunity for complimentary roles and learning between ‘experts’ and citizens, without relying solely on the technical assistance transfer mode. This is the essence of what I advocate as a relational approach to development.

I argue that capacity development can be a bridge to provide technical cooperation that encourages and respects local autonomy and ownership. More than this, capacity development sets the scene for learning from, and building on, local knowledge and strengths with external knowledge and support. Thus it contributes to a better conception of reciprocal and relational change and development. Enhancing capacity development provides an opportunity to advocate for civic science and social learning at different and complementary levels—responding flexibly to the interconnectedness of issues and a variety of contexts in responsive and collaborative ways. Such a deep conception of development is beyond the vision of early, technical models of sustainable development and is more compatible with more recent, integrated and deeper views ‘rebadged’ as sustainability (Robinson, 2004, p. vii).

**Development**

Development may be defined most simply as “good change” (Chambers, 2005, p. 186). The Dictionary of the Social Sciences suggests development is “change identifiable as the fulfilment of possibilities inherent in an earlier state—whether in reference to organisms, psyches, or societies” (Calhoun, 2002). An important distinction here is that development is for the environment not just humans. It also includes people’s minds, spirits and interdependent interaction in the community, all working toward their inherent potential.
The Brundtland Commission (1987) stated that development had as its major objective “the satisfaction of human needs and aspirations” (p. 87). Brundtland also recognised that needs and aspirations could be interpreted differently, particularly by Northern countries that were recognised as using disproportionate and unsustainable levels of the earth’s finite resources. Brundtland therefore urged moderation, saying:

*Perceived needs are socially and culturally determined, and sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards that are within the bounds of the ecological possible and to which all can reasonably aspire.* (p. 88)

Clearly Brundtland recognised that all countries could simply not consume at the levels of the rich ones. Since 1987, global warming has been shown to be a direct result of the development excesses of the Northern countries with a minority of the world’s population (N. H. Stern & Great Britain Treasury, 2007). To add to this situation caused by unsustainable Northern lifestyles, the aspirations of the growing middle classes in India and China demonstrate the foresight of the Brundtland concerns and the unsustainability of the dominant economic paradigm centred on continuous growth in a finite world. They remind us that as Brown (2008) says:

> The western economic model—the fossil-fuel-based, automobile-centered, throwaway economy—is not going to work for China. If it doesn’t work for China, it won’t work for India or the other 3 billion people in developing countries who are also dreaming the American dream. And in an increasingly integrated world economy, where we all depend on the same grain, oil, and steel, it will not work for industrial countries either. (p. xii)

In other words we need to rein in ‘perceived needs’ of consumption beyond the ecologically sustainable. The world cannot just make consumption green without reconfiguring development (McMichael, 2009). The question is whether this necessary reduction in excessive material consumption in the North can be achieved without a reduction in ‘quality’ of life or wellbeing and counter intuitively whether it can actually enhance the wellbeing of humans and the global environment (Tim Jackson, 2009; The
The New Economics Foundation’s Happy Planet Index encourages a deeper reflection about material wealth and how it is conceived or valued and the flip side of whether some ‘rich’ sustainable livelihoods in the South can remind us of the importance of being and relating as opposed to doing and consuming (The New Economics Foundation, 2009). This deeper reflection requires acknowledgement of the right to development for those currently without access to a safe, fulfilled and healthy life as compared to the ethics of over consuming rather than changing and responding (Singer, 2009).

International development has at least since WWII generally been narrowly considered as demanding resource transfer to countries economically poor. While discourse in the Social Sciences has questioned this stereotyping of the helpless ‘poor’ ‘third world’ or ‘South’ for categorisation (Berger, 2004; Dirlik, 2004), it has also continued to be embraced by many writers (McFarlane, 2006). Dichter (2003) reminds us that it is really only since 1945 that the West has seen “poverty as a deplorable condition” compared to the earlier part of the 20th century when, for example most people in Europe and the US “lived off the land, and though they owned little, didn’t see themselves as poor” (p. 52). Dichter’s important insight into a less black and white view of poverty is one of a number of antecedents of what he terms modern Development with a big D as opposed to development “that was not deliberately intended/planned” (p. 49). The other antecedents he notes (for modern development) were the enlightenment belief in progress; that humans could be agents of their own destiny; actions could be taken for development by people other than the primary beneficiary; and that governments have a role to play in development, not just private capital, charities or missions (pp. 50-54). These foundations have provided many rich fruits but also some deep dilemmas and problems.
As an urgent and immediate response to life threatening poverty (as opposed to people being simply cash poor), calls for urgent practical development are understandable and appropriate. The MDGs agreed to by all nations in 2000 provide specific goals and benchmarks for basic development progress by 2015. The question then is what is the best way to achieve not just the goals but ingrain vibrant and diverse global and national processes that allow autonomy and progress toward development? So responses to poverty must also be considered within the wider development arena where processes and structures sustaining inequality and injustice (within and between countries) must be considered, in addition to environmental and quality of life factors (related to meaningful and fulfilling lives for all people). Measures like the Human Development index of UNDP, the Human Wellbeing index, and the Genuine Progress Indicator or the happy Planet Index have gone some way towards reflecting these broader development processes (Copestake, 2008; Talberth, 2008; The New Economics Foundation, 2009). Indeed in consideration of how the international community should respond after the 2015 MDG deadline, some are suggesting human wellbeing provides a good framework (McGregor & Sumner, 2009; Sumner, Haddad, & Gomez-Climent, 2009). McGregor and Sumner (2009) say the 3D Human Wellbeing approach can value add to the conventional focus on poverty because firstly:

It explicitly integrates relational and subjective perspectives on human wellbeing. How people relate to others and what people feel they can do or can be play a strong role in what people will actually do and be able to do.

Secondly they say it provides a positive perspective on what people can do rather than what they cannot do. Such indicators and frameworks require consideration of factors like the negative environmental effects of excessive material consumption as well as poverty and the importance of social, cultural and political factors to provide meaning and authentic participation in meaningful change. These indicators clearly show that the
countries with the highest GDPs do not necessarily have the highest wellbeing (Tim Jackson, 2009). For example Central America is the region with the highest average score in the 2006 Happy Planet Index as a result of the regions relatively good life expectancy, high life satisfaction and ecological footprint beneath its internationally equitable share (The New Economics Foundation & Friends of the Earth, 2006, p. 4).

Hinton and Groves (2004) summarise how development has commonly been approached and how we can shift this, drawing on culture, politics and individual agency to create change.

International development practice is currently based on a linear outcome-oriented perspective, which focuses on individual institutions within the system to a degree that excludes attention to the relationships among actors. Thus many development efforts fail to recognize the significance of cultural and political influences, and the potential of well-placed individual agency and leadership to effect systemic change. (p. 5)

According to Thomas (2000), development is a broad goal that should present a wide vision for ‘positive change’; account for the historical processes of social change as well as the dominant contemporary emphasis on “development as practice” focusing on deliberate efforts at improvement (pp. 3-9). The predominant focus on improvement has emphasised a global response to poverty, under-emphasising other elements like interdependence, justice, equality, environmental sustainability, cultural diversity and difference, consumption, individual agency and fair power relations that should be fundamental considerations within a broader vision of development.

The 2006 UN report “World Economic Situation and Prospects” highlighted the net transfer of resources from developing to developed countries despite apparent significant aid flows from North to South to reduce poverty. It says:

Over an extended period of nearly ten years, the international financial system has seen net transfer of financial resources from developing to developed countries. The magnitude of these transfers has risen steadily
from an estimated $8.1 billion in 1997 to $483.4 billion in 2005. (United Nations, 2006, p. 65)

However, despite the resource transfer shown by the UN, the more common view remains focussed on economic growth. As a result, David Lewis (2005) suggests “for some observers, a neo liberal consensus around economic globalisation and a belief in the transformative power of markets to reduce poverty has now begun to replace development as the dominant idea that informs global change” (p. 16).

Because of the ambiguities illustrated above with the legitimacy of development ‘assistance’ and its effective implementation to combat poverty and inequality and the underlying structures that cause them, some have concluded that we are now in a post development phase. Sachs (1992) says the “idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape” (p. 1). Many meanwhile continue to struggle with the concept of development and its ambiguous rhetoric and practice, with persistent dedication and resolve to learn and innovate for ‘good change’ despite structural and conceptual barriers (L. D. Brown & Timmer, 2006; Ellerman, 2005; Fowler & Biekart, 2008; Green, 2008; D. Lewis & Kanji, 2009).

The global financial crisis of 2008/9 provided a sober reminder to the limits of the markets and the importance of government regulation and intervention (United Nations, 2009). The OECD’s 2009 Development Cooperation Report reflects this shift when it talks about the Synthesis Report of the Paris Declaration evaluations (Wood, Kabell, Sagasti, & Muwanga, 2008). The Paris Declaration evaluation Thematic Study (E. D. Stern, et al., 2008) reviews adoption from 2005 of a consensus around an improved “new aid paradigm”19 or “how aid and development should be understood and managed” (p. vi) including the conclusion that economic policy and budgeting should support development results not be seen in themselves as development goals. Chapter 5 of the OECD report (2009c) explicitly calls in its title for “Using the Paris declaration

19 For a summary of what Stern et al. refer to, see Appendix 7
for broader development” and states in part: “Development is about more than just poverty reduction. To be long lasting and equitable, it must also address questions of gender equality, environmental sustainability and human rights – which are, in turn, drivers of development” (p. 18). So we are again reminded that development is about ‘drivers’ or processes not just ends. The key elements of Stern’s et al. (2008) new paradigm are articulated through the themes in this chapter although it is acknowledged that some elements of my assessment fit within what they acknowledge are “limits to the consensus” particularly the “balance between the economic and the social emphases” (and even more my political emphasis), and the lack of clarity around the “role and extent of participation by different stakeholders (citizens, civil society, the private sector) needed to help design and keep on track development processes” (p. vii).

What the ‘broader conception of development’ shows us is that processes to tackle inequality, rights and the environment are crucial beyond just addressing poverty. I believe ‘broader development’ requires building on the above consensus and going beyond its limits—particularly by active citizen involvement in the design of development processes which requires engaging with the politics and power required for change (McMichael, 2009). Essential to this engagement is helping people understand and genuinely appreciate their own links to or contact with, poverty and inequality. This can provide an opening for people to face structural and political issues and link them to their own personal lifestyle, agency or opportunities to make a difference. Such opportunities are enhanced by bringing people face to face with international realities and complexities beyond simple poor/rich stereotypes. This is increasingly important for responding to the diversity in our globalised world beyond North and South dichotomies for example with the ‘accelerated developers’ of the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and the existence of significant inequality in the North.
There has been accelerating public recognition of the significant and important danger and injustice posed by global warming, over the last two years. As a sign of this on January 17 2007 the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* moved the hands of its doomsday clock two minutes closer to midnight citing global failure to solve problems of nuclear weapons and climate change (2007). However climate change must be addressed as an issue embedded in and reflecting global injustice not just environmental mis-management, as Roberts and Parks (2007) say:

> The issue of global climate change—which itself is characterized by tremendous inequality in vulnerability, responsibility, and mitigation—can therefore not be viewed, analysed, or responded to in isolation from the larger crisis of global inequality. (p. 14)

**Poverty, inequality and power**

Despite extensive development initiatives over the last 50 years, global poverty and inequality persist. Sachs’ Millennium Project report (2005) explained continuing significant global poverty despite some progress towards the MDGs in certain parts of the world and this was only reinforced by the most recent report of the Secretary General (2010). It says:

> There were still 1.4 billion people living in extreme poverty in 2005, down from 1.8 billion in 1990. However, as China has accounted for most of this decrease, without China, progress does not look very encouraging; in fact, the number of people living in extreme poverty actually went up between 1990 and 2005 by about 36 million. In sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia, poverty and hunger remain stubbornly high. The number of “$1 a day poor” went up by 92 million in sub-Saharan Africa and by 8 million in West Asia during the period 1990 to 2005. (United Nations General Assembly, p. 4)

While there has been a significant focus in recent years on the levels of global poverty and measures to respond to this, the increasing levels of global inequality have not been highlighted to the same extent. This has changed in the last five years with publications measuring the growing inequalities between and within countries: Cornia’s (2004) *Inequality, Growth and Poverty in an Era of Liberalization and Globalization* and Milanovic’s (2005) *Worlds Apart: Measuring International and Global Inequality* and

Nel (2006) suggests that these and other recent publications demonstrate that:

> We must look at the whole spectrum of the income (and wealth) distribution in countries, in contrast to the singular emphasis on the lower end of the spectrum—poverty reduction—that has dominated development thinking for the past decade. (Nel, p. 698)

Nel uses data from the University of Texas Inequality Project (UTIP) for low and middle income developing countries, ex socialist transition economies (including China), and high income countries to emphasise that as Cornia (2004) shows for all groups there is a “systemic tendency to higher levels of inequality over the last three decades of the 20th century” (Nel, 2006, p. 695)\(^\text{20}\).

What Nel (2006) concludes from the recent literature is that:

> Contrary to an earlier widespread belief that there was a tradeoff between inequality and development, and that high inequality was an unavoidable, if only temporary corollary of economic modernization, recent empirical findings indicate that high levels of initial wealth and income inequality within countries deflate subsequent growth prospects, and inhibit attempts to structure economic growth so as to benefit the poor. (p. 697)

This point is only reinforced by Greig, Hulme, and Turner’s (2007) book that if we want to cover “development theory and practice in the 21st century” “challenging global inequality” not simply poverty reduction should be the main frame (Greig, et al., 2007).

Global poverty is unacceptable while a minority enjoys an overabundance of resources. Nederveen Pieterse (2002) suggests a focus on inequality at a national level is not politically sensitive while to focus on poverty is more controversial. He contends that the opposite is the case globally where it is safe to speak of poverty but more sensitive

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to speak of inequality because of its ramifications across borders (as discussed earlier with regard to climate change).

Global inequality helps sustain domestic privilege. The belief that the risks that global inequality poses can be contained in the global margins is contradicted by the cross-border effects of environmental degradation, migration, transnational crime and terrorism. In explaining global inequality, economic accounts ignore inequal relations of power. (p. 1)

Awareness of global inequality, injustice and power is in other words crucial beyond simply acknowledging that poverty exists. As a result, helping people understand and genuinely appreciate their own links to poverty and inequality beyond national borders may provide a point of engagement for people to face structural and political issues that may encourage them to taking personal action.

The next two sections will consider the origins of the development model and why technical cooperation – such an essential ingredient for development – has not been as successful as expected and sometimes has been blamed for making the situation worse.

**Origins of the development model**

The Marshall plan provided a huge injection of public capital to aid the recovery of Western Europe after the Second World War. Its success produced optimism for rapid economic growth globally and so a similar approach was favoured by the North for developing countries of the South (Arndt, 2000). However the significant “human and institutional capital” appropriate for a market oriented economy was seen as having been the key for success in Western Europe compared with the “paucity of trained manpower and the inadequate/inappropriate institutions present in the developing regions” (Arndt, 2000, p. 154). Technical cooperation or technical assistance was the measure designed to overcome this in the developing countries of the South (Arndt, 2000).
In US President Harry Truman’s inaugural address to congress on January 20 1949, he encapsulated a perception of a problem in ‘underdeveloped areas’ and a recipe for change that is still powerfully evident today. While this was probably a genuine call for a compassionate response, the underlying value assumptions and global political context of anti-communism provide a background to this statement that is clear from the rest of his speech. They are hinted at here by his mention of “living in conditions approaching misery”, “primitive and stagnant economic life” and “peace loving peoples”. The comments suggest poor people cannot be happy, and can be seen as backward and automatically aggressive if they do not choose the ‘right’ economic system of capitalism. Truman’s comments illustrate the complex socio-political environment in which development and technical assistance is embedded.

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas. More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery…Their economic life is primitive and stagnant…I believe that we should make available to peace loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realise their aspirations for a better life….Greater production is the key to prosperity and peace. And the key to greater production is a wider and more vigorous application of modern scientific and technical knowledge. (Truman, 1949 cited in Escobar, 1995, p. 3)

This approach has come to be understood in development studies as the modernisation approach or what McMichael and others have termed the “development project” (Kothari & Minogue, 2002; McMichael, 2000, p. 7). It assumed the potential for the linear progress of the South toward ‘modern’ or material development with the right combination of aid through technical skills as the means to ‘production’ or in today’s terms a thriving economy. A central basis for the modernisation approach to international development was Walt Rostow’s “The Stages of Economic Growth: a non communist manifesto”. Rostow suggested that all societies would pass through the same stages of development to achieve modernisation (Rostow, 1960). While the expectations of modernisation have been tempered and other theories advanced to some extent in
recent years, there still remains significant adherence to its key premises including the
drivers of economic growth, technical skills and knowledge along a linear trajectory to
achieve materially rich development (Hinton & Groves, 2004).

The OECD is a respected organisation that is forward thinking and yet is guided by
solidly mainstream development theory (grounded in modernisation theory). As a forum
of 31 ‘market democracies’, including the USA, UK, France, Japan, and Australia, it
was set up to coordinate the Marshall Plan (OECD, 2007). The OECD aims to assist
members and others understand and respond to “new developments and concerns. These
include trade and structural adjustment, online security, and the challenges related to
reducing poverty in the developing world” (OECD, 2007).

Development, according to the OECD (2006a), requires two elements: physical
infrastructure like buildings, bridges, transport or machinery and the “skills and
productive aptitudes available in the economy” (p. 112). ‘Technical cooperation’21 (TC)
dresses the second category, which aims to enhance capacity in developing countries
either with direct provision of skills from outside or enhancing the capacity of local
people. Main elements of TC have commonly been: educational assistance via
scholarships and traineeships; provision of personnel such as experts, teachers or
volunteers from donor countries, or funding or provision of them by recipient or other
countries of the South; and research on developing country problems (OECD, 2006a, p.
112). In 2004 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members’ spending
on technical cooperation amounted to $20.8 billion or 27% of total net Overseas

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21 Technical assistance is often used interchangeably with technical cooperation but the OECD regards it
as ‘investment related’ technical cooperation for the ‘implementation of capital projects’ which it does
not separate out in its ‘statistics of aggregate flows’. For example the 2002 Technical Cooperation
Special Issue of UNDP’s Development Policy Journal stated: “in this journal, free standing “technical
assistance” is used synonymously with “technical cooperation”, according to the preference of each
author” (Morgan, 2002)
Development Assistance (OECD, 2006b, p. 7) and almost half if “investment related” TC is included (OECD, 2006a, p. 113).

An important aspect of TC has been the technical knowledge that underpins it—this has led to a thriving knowledge management focus over the last fifteen years. In 1996 the president of the World Bank foreshadowed a new emphasis on ‘knowledge partnership’ which was demonstrated by The World Bank’s 1998 World Development Report that was devoted to “Knowledge for Development” (World Bank, 1998). Chataway and Wield (2000) however caution that this strengthened “an unfortunate focus on what can be made explicit, scientific, tangible and ‘hard’ over the intangible, complex, tacit and ‘soft’” (p. 804). They say:

There are dangers in presenting knowledge and information as commodities that can simply be transferred from rich to poor communities in attempts to ‘solve’ poverty. Such simplistic efforts are likely to focus on technological hardware rather than social, economic and human ‘software’ that is essential to poverty relief and growth potential. (p. 813)

From their analysis Chataway and Wield highlight that the:

Emphasis on filling gaps and provision of knowledge and information as commodities underemphasizes the importance of process based issues. Supplying knowledge as though it is a neutral and uniformly transferable commodity package is unlikely to resolve the essential problems of adsorption and learning. (p. 817)

They emphasise instead the importance the knowledge management literature places on ‘knowing as a process’ emphasising intangibles and knowledge embedded in people and organisations that may loosely form Wenger’s (1998) notion of ‘communities of practice’ (Chataway & Wield, 2000, p. 818).

The importance of technical and scientific solutions to problems was emphasised by Truman in 1945 and has been grounded in the modernisation view of development first enunciated by Walt Rostow in his theory of stages of growth (1960). This has provided
a useful framework for development because of the way it allows rational planning and measurement for goals or targets along a linear track. This way of operating has been critiqued for example by Easterly (2006b) who discusses “why the West’s efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good”. A different, process conscious style is needed to allow surprises and adapt to different and dynamic contexts, people and politics and Easterly (2006a) advocates for “searchers” rather than “planners” to do this. There has in fact been a very forceful and ongoing debate initiated by Easterly and Sachs in the Washington Post (J. D. Sachs, 2005) but also subsequently added to by others either supporting one or the other or recognising the points from both authors while finding a more middle way.

**The problems with technical cooperation**

As mentioned previously, Sach’s (UN Millennium Project, et al., 2005) report on progress and plans for achieving the MDGs detailed some success as well as problems with progress. He related the problems in part to the poor quality of development finance, particularly bilateral aid, stating among other issues that it was:

- highly unpredictable; targeted at technical assistance and emergency aid rather than investments, long term capacity, and institutional support; tied to contractors from donor countries; driven by separate donor objectives rather than coordinated to support a national plan; and not evaluated or documented systematically for results. (p. 197)

The report also complained of systematic overlooking of important MDG priorities like environmental management and the promotion of gender equity (UN Millennium Project, et al., 2005, p. 198). So where International Development Organisations (IDOs) want “to improve the performance of their contributions” because of “heightened concern about the performance and results of development cooperation programmes and their ability to make much of a difference to a whole set of intractable issues”, “TA is an obvious focus of attention” (Morgan, 2002, p. 16). This is particularly pertinent when as
mentioned earlier, TC of all kinds may constitute half of all foreign aid (OECD, 2006a, p. 113).

Morgan (2002) summarises some of the diverse reasons why TA failed including the following:

- TA effectiveness requires local ownership, commitment and motivation but these were too subjective and political to analyse well.
- There were disparities in power and influence of stakeholders; greater accountability to donors than aid recipients; and recipients became more accountable to donors than their own citizens.
- External technical and policy advice were considered the missing ingredients for development while the crucial understanding of local context was not prioritised.
- Key contextual factors (considered the ‘soft’ elements) like motivation, ownership, credibility, incentives and management of relationships, were overlooked because they were considered too difficult or ambiguous to understand and manage. As a result there was a focus on ‘hard’ elements like contracts, terms of reference, budgets and technical implementation strategies.
- Often TA had conflicting objectives and was oriented to supplier preferences while recipients focused on indirect benefits like operating costs or equipment.
- With TA via projects there was a ‘fragmentation of the process’ that discouraged coordination with other players to maintain control of outcomes for accountability purposes.
- There was general arrogance about external knowledge and techniques while effective TA embraced lack of local knowledge and encouraged learning and adapting to this despite the time and resources required (Morgan, 2002).
Arndt (2000) supplements Morgan’s specific concerns about TA/TC with a few more namely:

- A preoccupation with tangible outputs rather than strengthening institutions and the capacity of their staff.
- Over-reliance on long term expatriate advisers who don’t fit well within local structures because of their generous remuneration and advisor status without significant local accountability. They also “almost invariably possess privileged access to office supplies, equipment and vehicles. Even in the absence of cultural factors, the combination of high pay, little accountability and privileged access to critical inputs could easily breed resentment and serve to demoralize local staff. When cultural factors are included, the breeding ground for negative dynamics between resident expatriate advisers and local staff becomes especially fertile” (p. 165).
- He also says he “would add would add lack of gender awareness to the list of weaknesses of TC in general and TC personnel in particular” (p. 166).

One of the reasons Morgan (2002) advances for the ongoing failure of TA was the dynamic of what he terms the “who benefits” question. He says: “Interest groups that controlled public decision making in both the supplier and recipient countries tried to capture many of the benefits from TA, including jobs and income, higher fees, overhead costs, bureaucratic power and organizational survival” (p. 11). Morgan concludes that unacceptable TA outcomes were accepted because of the direct benefits afforded participants but that in fact “effective TA needed a network of champions to make it work—a group of people who cared profoundly in both professional and personal terms about the fate of interventions” (p. 14). He draws clues for effective TA from a number of positive field examples and looks for commonalities. With these cases he says:
Technical ingenuity, much of which TA helped, related to the functional, the physical and the procedural. But the critical element was the quality of social ingenuity at the country level - the ability of individuals and groups to collaborate for productive ends [my emphasis] (p. 15).

More recently Li (2007) has added to the analysis of technical assistance or what she terms “the will to improve”, which could also fall under the umbrella of ‘development as practice’ (Thomas, 2000). Li does her analysis by looking at the history of attempts at improvement in Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. She calls those who engage in the ‘will to improve’ as trustees who “claim to know how others should live, to know what is best for them, to know what they need” (p. 5). Despite what might be seen as the negative connotations of this, she says the objective is not domination or exploitation but “to enhance their capacity for action, and to direct it” or to improve the world (p. 5). Li sees ‘the will to improve’ as part of a ‘field of power’ Foucault termed ‘government’, meaning the “attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means” (p. 5) and this means “calculation requires, in turn, that the processes to be governed be characterized in technical terms” (p. 6). Li says such power is not usually operated in a coercive way but instead by more subtle inducement. However, she says: “when power operates at a distance people are not necessarily aware of how their conduct is being conducted or why, so the question of consent does not arise” (p. 5). She shows two interconnected practices are needed to translate the process of improvement into specific programs: firstly, problematising the deficiency that needs to be solved and secondly, “rendering technical” the issue and the solution. She says “rendering technical” depoliticizes the situation to the point “they focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group impoverishes another” (p. 7). By rendering the issue as technical a boundary is drawn between those “with the capacity to diagnose deficiencies in others, and those who are subject to expert direction” (p. 7).
So we see the importance in technical cooperation of collaborative ways of working between the local and external that encourage ownership, understanding and learning in keeping with the local context and constraints. There is renewed emphasis on capacity development, local knowledge, ownership and contextual adaptation, learning and attention to gender by external actors or experts. One area with great potential that has got less traction is Morgan’s emphasis on the importance of networks of champions that care about the fate of development interventions at a personal and professional level.

**Participatory spaces for engagement and dialogue**

It is understandable that there have been criticisms of technical assistance and knowledge when they are used only as instrumental tools for development. However, it is equally important to not fall into a simplistic dualism that undermines the need for technically sound approaches and implies local knowledge is all powerful and outside expert knowledge is always destructive (G. Wilson, 2006). It is also important to consider spaces for the interaction and acknowledgement of experimentation, dialogue and learning by different players both external and local, expert and lay, depending on local contexts (Sillitoe, Pottier, & Bicker, 2003).

According to David Mosse (2001), participatory systems like participatory rural appraisal (PRA) that acknowledge local knowledge may in fact also prove quite compatible with top down planning systems. Mosse directly contradicts the idea that for example a “focus on people’s knowledge has to provide a radical challenge to existing power structures, professional positions and knowledge systems”. He suggests that such a transformation is possible but emphasises the importance of examining “social practices of local knowledge production”. Mosse reminds us that we know from Long and Villareal (1994) “knowledge must be looked at relationally – that is as a product of social relationships – and not as a fixed commodity” (p. 17).
As a result, there is a growing push for a more nuanced idea of professional expertise beyond the ‘technocratic’ label and situated within ‘communities of practice’. Wilson (2006) takes insights from knowledge management, learning, participation and citizenship literature like Leach, Scoones and Wynne (2005). They contrast under the banner of ‘performing citizenships’ the common passive engagement of citizens and science, to a model of “the citizen as a more autonomous creator and bearer of knowledges located in particular practices, subjectivities and identities, who engages in more active ways with the politicized institutions of science” (p. 12). Wilson (2006) says the practical engagements between development experts and ‘performative citizenship’: “creates learning spaces where co-production of knowledge which can contribute to broader processes of change is possible” (p. 502).

It is clear that participatory processes can be co-opted and depoliticised by technocratic management techniques but Wilson describes an alternative to these dichotomies where citizens and experts working together create a space for learning when they recognise their different perspectives and contributions (p. 512). He considers this participatory space as socially built, unique and dynamic, including and excluding some actors but nevertheless filled by people with diverse history, knowledge and as a result a “site of social and power relations” (p. 512). The resulting space does not prescribe learning there as transformative or instrumental – but open to both, or either to occur. As an example of such spaces, Wilson discusses the use of tacit local knowledge to successfully oppose or shape projects or other development interventions for example using a Joint Forest Management project in India to close a mine or achieve the construction of a promised but not completed road, as explained by Hildyard et al.
This demonstrates the possibilities of successful agency for development despite structural impediments.

Drawing on Senge’s (1990) notion of ‘team learning through dialogue’, Wilson (2006) takes us to ‘communities of practice’ as crucial because of “the interactions of people in pursuit of shared interests or objectives, which involve both applying learning as well as the learning process itself” but he says this needs “something compelling to bring people together, a real opportunity to share useful knowledge and develop a valued identity” (p. 515). Wilson says:

The extent to which these different knowledges can be used as sources for joint knowledge creation, rather than simply extracting from each other to meet the strategic self-interests of different actors, does depend on the ability of a community of practice to move to a situation where the actors feel empowered to challenge each other, and to share uncomfortable thought processes and ideas for change (p. 517).

This challenging engagement provides a bridge from what Wilson calls “instrumental to more political learning…characterised as moving from strategic ‘learning from/about’ to transformational ‘learning with’” (p. 517). This process does not require experts (or presumably other actors) to set aside their specific expertise but to focus on ‘learning with’. He says: “such a relationship requires trust, or the mutual confidence between the actors that one will not act opportunistically and damage the other” (p. 518).

To summarise, knowledge and technical information are important for development but should not be valued just as commodities because that insufficiently acknowledges the importance of relationships, power, process and learning for all development actors. Equally simplistic dichotomies that romanticise local or ‘community’ knowledge at the expense of respect for external knowledge must make way for creating spaces for knowledge to evolve through genuine, honest and constructive engagement by different actors (expert and lay) with different preparation, experiences and perspectives. This
directs us to the importance of capacity development as a way of contextualising knowledge and technical information to enable local ownership, agency and learning.

**Capacity development**

The importance of capacity development was recognised at the OECD-DAC Paris High Level Forum on aid effectiveness in 2005 and has more recently been promoted by the OECD DAC Network on Governance (OECD, 2006b). This shows official acknowledgement in the aid sector that “TC remains a controversial aspect of development cooperation” and therefore new measures are required to improve its effectiveness (OECD, 2006a, p. 125). The OECD (2006c) suggests two approaches aimed at making TC more effective: firstly, “to reform TC mechanisms and modalities so as to better support capacity development” and secondly, by focusing TC “on sectors rather than mechanisms” (pp. 125,126). I will focus initially on the capacity development element and return later to the sectoral focus when discussing sustainability.

Capacity development can be defined as a “process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create and maintain capacity over time” (OECD, 2006b, p. 19). While capacity building was in the past regarded as just another component in technical cooperation, it has over the last few years gained new conceptual depth and importance because it “has been one of the least responsive targets of donor assistance” (OECD, 2006b, p. 7). The “building” capacity language is now commonly dropped in favour of capacity development because of the recognition that it should develop existing capacity and work through existing structures and national priorities. The OECD (2006b) ‘Good Practice’ paper specifically acknowledges the “increasingly recognised importance of capacity and the difficulty of achieving it” (p. 7).
While capacity development is now regarded as a crucial element in improved technical cooperation (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; OECD, 2006b), capacity development and its predecessor capacity building have also been analysed and critiqued. Critics have argued that capacity development can encourage either a shallow technical project or it can be a deeply social and transformative process. Warburton (1998) identifies two approaches to capacity building, the first is focused on the poor or vulnerable, as with traditional community development methods, where recipients have the motivation and receive the rewards depending on their own purpose. The second is a more instrumental approach using it as a strategy to specific ends like creating effective communities through increasing social capital. She says such approaches (that may coexist) raise questions about: “whose capacity is being built, by whom, for what, and who controls the process” (p. 25). These are fundamentally issues of ownership and accountability that have been reflected through reviews of TA and the Paris Declaration principles.

Capacity development needs to be a two way process that includes structural and political change in order to be effective. Warburton says:

> Capacity building is in some ways an offshoot of community development, and retains the historical focus on disadvantaged groups. However, capacity-building tends to focus primarily on individual growth and social development (always an aspect of community development) rather than on social change and political participation. (p. 26)

This is dangerous because:

> Any programmes of capacity-building must recognize that what is needed is not a redressing of the inequalities of abilities, but a redressing of the

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22 Community development can be defined as “the process of establishing or re-establishing, structures of human community within which new ways of relating, organizing social life, promoting human rights and meeting human needs become possible…drawing on the resources, expertise and wisdom of the community itself” (Ife & Tesoriero, 2006, p. 2). However some government led practices under this banner have also led to criticism of community development as a tool of government or colonial control (Mayo, 2000, p. 5).
inequalities of resources and opportunities to practice and develop those abilities in ways which others in society take for granted. (p. 27)

This perspective reiterates the points made in the earlier discussion about inequality and poverty that emphasised the need to address these issues as matters of justice not charity.

We can draw on Freire’s (1972) concept of ‘conscientization’ that is based on dialogue between teachers and lay people for mutual liberation. Warburton (1998) takes from this an emphasis on learning via debate and dialogue as essential for sustainable development. She advocates a new paradigm without a rigid outcome and instead suggests: “a way of thinking about change which is organic and flexible and continuously developing” (p. 29). This she says:

    Recognizes that a negotiation can take place in which experts and lay people come together in an interactive process, reconnecting science and technical knowledge and their cultural context…Placing different knowledges and possibly values, alongside our own, allows us to re-evaluate our own knowledge and beliefs. (p. 29).

In the light of the critiques of TC and the more instrumental versions of capacity development, UNDP is promoting 10 guiding principles for capacity development. These were endorsed in 2006 by the OECD DAC Governance Network which acknowledged there was a growing consensus that capacity development was one of the most crucial issues for donors and partners in order to achieve aid effectiveness (OECD, 2006b, p. 7). The 10 principles are:

1. Don’t rush;

2. Respect the value system and foster self esteem;

3. Scan locally and globally; reinvent locally;

4. Challenge mindsets and power differentials;

5. Think and act in terms of sustainable capacity outcomes;
6. Establish positive incentives;

7. Integrate external inputs into national priorities, processes and systems;

8. Build on existing capacities rather than creating new ones;

9. Stay engaged under difficult circumstances;

10. Remain accountable to ultimate beneficiaries.

(Lopes & Theisohn, 2003, p. 30)

The guiding principles for capacity development provide recognition of the essential deeper and more transformational side of capacity development suggested by Warburton. They include her exhortation to ‘include social change and political participation’ in principle four of challenging not just individual mindsets but also **power differentials**. However challenging power differentials and the associated priority on local ownership and accountability is not simple in the concrete side of development planning and practice. The MDGs are a good example of the challenge ahead given the urgency of achieving specific targets by 2015. This immediately makes the first principle-‘don’t rush’—a hard one to comfortably reconcile—and yet we must give serious priority without unthinking haste that will undermine local ownership for long term change. The MDGs provide important development benchmarks “beyond income as a measure of progress and poverty alleviation and include a broader range of targets related to health, education, agriculture, trade relations, debt aid, etc” (Therkildsen, 2005, p. 28).

The UN Sachs Report “Investing in Development” (UN Millennium Project, et al., 2005), makes it clear that it believes the MDGs are practically reachable by 2015 with careful policy, planning and significant funding. However this “top down approach to
planning” can be criticised as a ‘mixed blessing’ for capacity development (2005).

Therkildsen (2005) says:

The causes of poor organizational capacity – and relevant remedies – depend on many factors both inside and outside organizations, and that these are not just technical and financial but also relate to power and politics. There is a need to arrive at an appropriate (context specific) balance of incentives and power in favour of change, outside and inside the organizations developing capacity, which is the major challenge for any change strategy. (p. 30)

We see from Therkildsen (2005) the potential of the Sachs Report and other literature to underestimate the complexity of resolving capacity limitations for the MDGs. There is, he says, an over emphasis on “technical/functional capacity constraints within organizations” while literature on capacity has concluded that organizational change is commonly driven by external factors and internal power relations (p. 31). This is further complicated by the belief that increasing aid funds is feasible without considering whether increased funding is matched by capacity in poor countries “to absorb and utilize significant additional resources to increase relevant products and services” (p. 32).

Even the Chair of the OECD’s DAC says:

Our view of what is needed to reach the Paris Declaration targets—and the Millennium Development Goals—is clearer than ever…At the same time, it is strikingly evident that more of the same will not get us there. (OECD, 2009c, p. 15)

The complexity of resolving the capacity development issues at the core of responding to the MDGs, can be captured as what Ellerman (2004) terms ‘assisted self reliance’ which he says is “the fundamental conundrum of development assistance” (p. 149).

Ellerman suggests what has often resulted is ‘unhelpful help’ in the form of a helper motivating change via “aid and conditionalities as ‘carrots and sticks’” (p. 152). He says what is required is ‘autonomy respecting help’ where an ‘enabling helper’ searches for where “virtue is afoot on its own…and catalyzes social and economic linkages to spread
successes” (p. 152). In this case what he terms the “Socratic-Helper does not give answers but facilitates doers’ own-learning (e.g., experiments) and then peer-to-peer learning between doers” (p. 152). In other words, it is nurturing and respecting local autonomy that is crucial for effective and transformational help.

To achieve “an alternative approach to development assistance, we must explore indirect enabling methods—no matter how ill suited development agencies are to use these methods” (Ellerman, 2005, p. 52). Ellerman’s (2005) solution is: 1.) Start from existing institutions; 2.) See the situation through the client’s eyes, which means seeing “development assistance as a form of social learning23”; and 3.) respecting the autonomy of the clients or “doers” (pp. 104-118).

Lessons and trends from the last decade of practical initiatives for capacity development can be seen as shaping current understanding. A summary compiled by Ubels and Theisohn et al. (2005) reaffirm capacity development’s relevance in the light of reservations concerning power, ownership and accountability discussed earlier. They say there has been:

1. A shift from focusing on capacity in individual organizations to view capacity in networks and broader systems like “sectors, whole of government approaches, societal transformation” (p. 4) where the interplay between individuals and other institutions and systems is key.

2. There is more recognition of ‘soft’ and intangible components including leadership, values, motivation, power and organisational culture.

3. Capacity development is dynamic and must vary according to context and situation therefore needing ongoing strategic planning, negotiation and action

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23 Social learning can be described as the “processes that increase awareness, capacities, and repertoires of action amongst actors in a social domain” (L. D. Brown & Timmer, 2006, p. 3)
learning via its interactions. This means it cannot be designed in advance then implemented on the ground.

4. Capacity development cannot be organised top down but requires “decentralized social learning” (p. 4). This requires practical experimentation on the ground along with “horizontal and vertical learning” that encourages linkages between the micro and macro levels.

5. Capacity development “changes social, political, cultural and economic relations” (p. 5) and therefore demands that outside parties sensitively balance the tension between being non-partisan while also at times helping clarify development directions.

The capacity development trends and lessons demonstrate considerable affinity with Kaplan’s (1996) views of ‘non linear’, ‘unfolding’ development and a systems view. They also reassure us that capacity development should not be business as usual and must engage constructively with political and broader societal change. I believe this suggests there are obvious links between the problems of technical cooperation and the possible resolution through capacity development shifts to embrace relational aspects, learning, not being neutral and actively challenging socio-political connections, embracing values and developing capacity in networks and larger systems.

Systems thinking can challenge “assumptions about the need for planning objectives and control, and the ability of external agents to influence local change processes” (Hauck, 2005, p. 12). Volker Haulk (2005) reflects on discussion from two workshops of policy makers, aid agency and developing country practitioners, on systems thinking and its relevance to capacity development (CD). He highlights the importance of “emergence – the process through which elements of a system combine and interact over time to create a more effective whole” but asks how external inputs can encourage
this? (p. 12). He suggests systems thinking helps amplify how we understand the complexity of development processes in three ways. Firstly, any intervention must be seen as “part of a network of interacting systems and sub-systems” and hence “CD outcomes cannot be simply engineered through…external inputs. Inputs need to be flexible and able to adapt to future, usually unforeseeable, system behavior”. Secondly, he suggests a systems approach may provide an ‘explanatory analytical tool’ to both understand the intervention context and identify elements that may assist or discourage capacity development processes. Thirdly, he suggests systems thinking encourages an alternate way of thinking about roles for monitoring, evaluation and learning by emphasising “the importance of creating space within systems for learning, self organization and adaptation” (p. 12).

In summary, capacity development has been recognised by UNDP, the OECD and other development players including civil society, as an important way of countering many of the criticisms levelled at technical assistance. It has also been criticised for sometimes remaining a one way and non political attempt to reinforce practical problems as locally centred. Key identified trends and learning show that capacity development works well within a systems approach that recognises it cannot be neutral and must be continually adapted to fit changing development contexts and circumstances. It is also most effectively achieved through the interplay of a range of different development players, which takes us to the importance of a more relational way of understanding development in general well beyond its technical side.

**A relational approach to development**

Development is above all a learning process, which means we must broaden our outlook beyond “simple ‘Western’ management approaches towards more learning based practice that is appropriate to the culture in which the project takes place” (C. Nelson,
Bryce, & Willetts, 2006, p. 2). Nelson, Bryce and Willets say this is despite a frequent lack of acknowledgement of the importance of culture as noted by Jackson (2003, p. 2). Nelson et al. emphasise however that this is not simply an intellectual process but one linked directly to practical change. Jackson points out that ‘Western’ management approaches express an “instrumental view of people in organizations as a means to an end”, which sets them apart from other ‘non western’ perspectives that regard people as an end in themselves (Terence Jackson, 2003, p. 5). Thankfully there is a growing recognition of the importance of culture in development as noted earlier by writers like Radcliffe (2005) and Rao and Walton (2004). Radcliffe (2005) says:

> For a number of distinct actors, culture increasingly represents a key factor in development outcomes, increasing the meaningfulness of interventions for project beneficiaries and the social sustainability of projects for their administrators and donors. (p. 18)

Globalisation provides a useful vantage point for considering development and culture. While there are various versions of globalisation theory, they all distinguish themselves from modernisation theory by taking the focus off Western development experience. Instead they examine trans-national processes with diverse directions that are independent of countries or geographic areas (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 569). It is possible to analyse globalisation “culturally, economically, politically, and/or institutionally” but each instance may be differentiated by whether there is “increasing homogeneity or increasing heterogeneity” (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 569). These perspectives vary from the homogenising argument of Macdonaldisation (Ritzer, 2006) to the idea of cultural hybridisation and “global mélange” where the “clash between cultural diversity and globalization may well be considered a creative clash” (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004, p. 58). Beck (2000) distinguishes between globalism, globality and globalisation and discusses the linear thinking associated with globalism. This, he says, reduces global phenomena like ecology, politics, culture and civil society to the simple economic dimension (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 573). The creative
clash interpretation recognises the difference between “categories, forms, beliefs that go into the mixture” while also affirming similarities (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004, p. 77).

In other words globalisation provides opportunities not just constraints for a more inclusive range of social and economic issues and institutions of international cooperation. As Sherraden (2007) says: “Global civil society raises new concerns and gives voice to groups previously excluded from discussions of global issues” (p. 184).

We see that the growing recognition for bringing culture into development is positive but complex because it: “requires a rethinking of development’s objectives” (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 2). It is now understood as important because while: “impoverished people may have little more than cultural identities, this cultural capital is viewed in recent policy as the launch pad for transforming their relative position in multicultural societies” (Radcliffe, 2005, p. 7). Radcliffe (2005) suggests we need to go beyond just confronting the issue of whether culture is seriously considered with development to analysing “where, when and how…culture and development interact” (p. 17). While this will not be analysed in great detail in this chapter it is recognised as important for further reflection and analysis to be done on this issue particularly given the historical and continuing dualistic debate over whether international volunteers really provide a development contribution or are just cross cultural exchange.

Growing recognition of the broader development influences like culture is evidenced in many ways for example the theme of the 2008 State of the World Population by UNFPA titled “Reaching Common Ground: Culture, Gender and Human Rights”. It proclaims in its overview:

Culture is and always has been central to development. As a natural and fundamental dimension of people’s lives, culture must be integrated into
development policy and programming. The report gives an overview of the conceptual frameworks as well as the practice of development, looking at the everyday events that make up people’s experience of development. Culturally sensitive approaches call for cultural fluency – familiarity with how cultures work, and how to work with them. (UNFPA, 2008, p. 1)

Cultural sensitivity requires learning by development practitioners and those they work with. When development ‘practitioners’ and ‘beneficiaries’ are seen to both learn there is an opportunity to shift from beneficiaries ‘learning from’ practitioners to ‘learning with’. This active and mutual engagement can be contrasted with what Wilson (2007) terms ‘recycling current knowledge’:

‘Learning from’ can proceed from passive engagement, but ‘learning with’ is necessarily an active process of mutual engagement that allows space for expanding the boundaries of what is known. (p. 193)

In development a relational ontology (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Eyben, 2008; Slife, 2004) means aid effectiveness requires practical engagement that varies depending on the context. It also means constructive engagement with conflict that values different knowledge forms and approaches. This requires honest acknowledgement of power differentials and seeks to minimise negative external effects despite these (Johnson & Wilson, 2000).

An emphasis on the importance of relationships for aid effectiveness and quality was reiterated by a 2006 British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) report on quality in NGO development projects. The report questioned the “practical and conceptual shortcomings of ‘impact’ as the driver of performance management” and concluded that “the quality of an NGO’s work was mainly determined by the quality of its relationships with beneficiaries” (Keystone & Accountability, 2006, p. 7). Relationships are also highlighted as critical in the Paris Declaration quest for mutual accountability. The latest OECD Development Cooperation Report (2009c) shows that relationships are no longer solely an NGO domain. Noting lessons from recent evaluations, it says that:
Relationships lie at the heart of the commitment to mutual accountability both between donor and developing governments and between governments and their publics. (p. 84)

Singling out one of the five Paris development effectiveness principles the PD evaluation Synthesis Report (Wood, et al., 2008) talks of the importance of relationships and the political importance embedded in them. It conveys:

A sense that the joint processes for tracking progress and resolving problems fall short of the goals of mutual accountability…. All the commitments carry important political content, but the commitment to mutual accountability is precisely about the relationship itself, and brings into play the political interests, values and priorities of the endorsing governments and institutions, and of their respective constituents. (p. 28)

In other words central to the quality of relationships is power and politics. This is reflected in the evaluations case study of Australia where it says “overall, understanding of the first four pillars… is much stronger than for the fifth pillar (mutual accountability)” (Wood, et al., 2008, p. 80).

The idea that people and relationships are not simply a means to a development end, has implications for development ‘beneficiaries’ as well as ‘practitioners’. Jane Gilbert (2005) highlights the importance for development of self awareness and increased self knowledge in aid workers. She describes the importance of experiential learning where difficult feelings are openly reflected on with honesty and courage. This in a sense is part of the important role of culture and transparency in development.

This discussion suggests that development requires in development practitioners a learning based approach that is sensitive to culture and people’s individual experiences and context as part of a process of sharing power and working for justice. This is an approach that can help transform power differentials through the application of congruent practice through personal development, organisational learning, reciprocal relationships, mutual accountability and negotiation of process (Chambers, et al., 2001).
The idea of bridging structural constraints through individual agency is an empowering possibility that is given theoretical weight by Pierre Bordieu (1990). He aims to supersede what he believes to be a false opposition between objectivism and subjectivism or as he says the “absurd opposition between individual and society” (p. 31). He uses the terms ‘habitus’ to describe the mental or cognitive structures by which people deal with the social world. He suggests people have internalised schemes that they use to “perceive understand, appreciate and evaluate the social world. It is through such schemes that people both produce their practices and perceive and evaluate them” (Ritzer, 1996, p. 540).

From Bordieu we learn that a habitus is gained through extended periods occupying a certain position within the social world and that as a result people’s habitus varies depending on the position people hold in the social world. He suggests it is practice which mediates between habitus and the social world (Ritzer, 1996). Bordieu thinks of the word ‘field’ relationally instead of structurally, as a “network of relations among the objective positions within it” (Ritzer, 1996, p. 542). Bringing together ‘field’ and ‘habitus’, Bourdieu shows how practices, particularly cultural practices, are established. He says: “The dispositions constituting the cultivated habitus are only formed, only function and are only valid in a field, in the relationship with a field… a dynamic situation in which forces are only manifested in their relationship with certain dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 94). So Bourdieu’s concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘field’ lend weight to a relational ontology for development as a particularly appropriate way of considering the interdependent relationships involved in practical change because it demonstrates that all development actors affect each other.
In arguing for a relational ontology that takes practice seriously, Slife (2004) says we must “consider the unique and radical character of practice, especially when understood as engaged and contextually situated activity” (p. 157). Slife criticised psychology’s assumption of the particular ontology of abstractionism assuming that “abstractions, such as theories, techniques, and principles, capture and embody the fundamentally real”. In this sense he says “practice has no separate identity of its own because it is merely an application of these abstractions” (p. 157). He concludes that: “A relational ontology would help psychologists understand the importance of these individual and community resources, where conflicts can be engaged rather than avoided, otherness can be valued rather than feared, and community can truly be a unity of diversity” (p. 174). In development, a relational ontology means aid effectiveness requires practical engagement that varies depending on the context. It also means constructive engagement with conflict that values different knowledge forms and approaches rather than stereotyping the ‘other’ (Said, 1985). This requires honest acknowledgement of power differentials and seeks to minimise negative external effects despite these.

It may be useful to distinguish between the relational and ‘content’ or ‘problem’ domains. Bouwen and Taillieu (2004) developed a flow chart of activities to distinguish these in natural resource projects. They say:

by pointing out the ‘relational tasks’ it becomes clear for the different parties how the contributions of social and engineering science can be distinguished but also that they are dealing with the same problem domains, albeit from a different angle. The engineering perspective concentrates on the progress of the task and the social science perspective focuses on the relational renegotiation through interpersonal conversations, creating new roles and identities” (p. 141).

In other words “relational practices are essentially task oriented actions with relational qualities of reciprocity and some kind of reflexivity” (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004, p. 141). This means the quality of relational practice can be characterised by certain
‘observable qualities’ namely: “(a) shared ownership of the task.; (b) open, concrete and personal communication; (c) mutually energising and mutually rewarding activity; (d) mutually testable and contradictable statements; (e) allowing for ‘deep’ learning” (Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004, p. 144).

The Bond report (Keystone & Accountability, 2006, p. 7), referred to earlier, shows the important role of civil society roles in development. It highlights, as Alan Fowler (1998a) said, that the sort of contractual arrangements required to achieve impact make authentic partnerships more difficult to achieve. In contrast, he affirmed “trust-based authentic partnerships” as “vital for development” and said in the long term development NGOs should transform “from intermediaries in a funding chain to facilitators of international cooperation between the diverse groups which comprise civil society” (p. 137).

In summary development may be interpreted as the interaction and interdependence of people and their environment towards positive change. Poverty remains a serious problem in the world and must be tackled for the lack of the basics of human existence it signifies. However inequalities exist within and between nations despite sufficient resources globally to respond to basic human needs – what is lacking is social justice to deliver collective benefit and limit individual, regional or national benefits where they negatively affect others. This structural change requires the use of knowledge and technical skills to open up spaces for interaction, learning and agency by individuals, civil society and other institutions, with mixtures of global and local ingredients adapted for diverse individual contexts and cultures. Development should use flexible methods to achieve capacity development and encourage solidarity and advocacy on the basis of synergies through interdependence for development, as is clear from a systems
approach. But if local context or environment should be a fundamental ingredient of international development why is there still commonly a separation of terminologies between development, and sustainable development or its latest interpretation sustainability? The next section pursues the discussion of whether this relational view of development fits with sustainable development or sustainability as distinct and contested but fundamentally aligned concepts.

**Sustainable development and sustainability**

The Brundtland Commission report in 1987 brought together on the international agenda concerns for development and environment in a way that lacked credence previously. It particularly gave countries in the South the opportunity to demonstrate the apparent contradictions of protecting the ‘global’ environment without first or at the same time finding practical solutions and livelihoods for poor people. The linking of environment and poverty in sustainable development with all its ramifications and complexities is a key ongoing discussion in this section.

As foreshadowed earlier, this section begins with a discussion of sectoral responses. It is important that a capacity development approach goes beyond individual organisations and individuals to networks and larger systems like sectors. This is evidenced by the common embrace and promotion of sector wide approaches (SWAPs) particularly by bilateral and multilateral development agencies. The call for sectoral issues is an attempt to apply a more holistic view to development interventions. In the past there was a tendency to limit aid to individual projects or mechanisms, which has been noted as problematic (in the preceding critique of TC or the systems approach). One way of categorising the idea of sustainable development is by better integrating development with the environment sector.
In this section I will argue that to some extent this is just what was initially proposed by the Brundtland Commission, when they suggested bringing together environment and development. This chapter tries to show the benefit of the sector wide approach from the starting point of the environment sector. However it attempts to go further by suggesting that while environment may be an apparent appropriate sectoral focus, (though potentially one of many, and one that I am using as an example in this thesis), some sectoral approaches may still be too narrow. This is not to question the prudence of a sectoral approach but more to ask whether it is broad enough? In this sense a discussion of sustainable development and sustainability may give license to an ever broader focus that recognises the crucial importance and benefits of trying to integrate all interdependent factors.

**Development and sustainable development**

I argue that so called ‘international’ development must also be sustainable and making development sustainable requires embracing a relational ontology for development. In this section I develop support for Robinson’s (2004) idea of sustainability while embracing O’Riordan’s (1998) notion of civic science founded on responding to others’ needs with a spirit of communal obligation, because it highlights what is required for a broader approach to technical assistance.

I am suggesting that if, in the past, the development framework has been unsuccessful in eradicating poverty and addressing inequality, a parallel and related version of it in sustainable development may provide a different and longer term ecologically viable way to frame the debate and the way forward, particularly in its latter day incarnation of sustainability. The idea of sustainable development emerged through Brundtland as an attempt to link the different development agendas of the North and the South through a more integrated approach. While it has had some success, it has also been open to
interpretation to some extent. This has led to criticism that it could be ‘all things to all people’ and hence was prone to a continuing over emphasis on economic growth and technical solutions to global social and political problems (Davison, 2001; Redclift, 1987). Robinson (2004) tries to distinguish the term sustainability from sustainable development by acknowledging the importance of economic growth and technical issues but placing them in parallel with a raft of other equally important social, political and cultural factors. Sustainability stresses, in O’Riordan’s terms, the importance of relating to other’s needs through interactive engagement and learning that has emerged as central in the preceding discussion.

**Historical environmental milestones and the relationship with development**

The World Commission on Environment and Development was asked to formulate ‘A global agenda for change’ by the General Assembly of the United Nations. One of the Commission’s central objectives was:

*To recommend ways concern for the environment may be translated into greater co-operation among developing countries and between countries at different stages of economic and social development and lead to the achievement of common and mutually supportive objectives that take account of the interrelationships between people, resources, environment and development.* (Brundtland & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. xiii)

The importance of interrelationships between people, resources and development is a recurring theme from the previous section on development and one that underpins the central notion of a relational view of development. Brundtland’s brief and findings gave weight to the interrelationships between these and the environment. Until then environment had been notable for its lack of serious treatment in international development discourse and practice and to some extent this claim continues to reflect the reality of development theory and practice. This section attempts to explain the important merging of development and environmental concerns through the ‘sustainable
development’ agenda. It argues that in essence all development, to be viable, should incorporate environment and development and hence be sustainable development.

Brundtland (1987) recommended a number of ‘strategic imperatives’ for policy change towards sustainable development “in all countries, with respect both to their own development and to their impacts on other nations’ development possibilities” (p. 93) highlighting the importance of ‘meeting essential human needs’, reviving and changing the quality of economic growth and ‘reorienting technology’.

The idea of sustainable development and a sustainable society emerged from the 1968 UNESCO biosphere conference and the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1974 (Dresner, 2002). The WCC notion of a sustainable society is particularly interesting because in addition to physical definitions of sustainability: 1. it began with an emphasis on equitable distribution, later to become central to Brundtland’s approach; and 2. it considered democratic participation, which was central for the U. N. Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. In other words, similar to Becker’s et al. definition in Chapter One, the WCC definition began not with environmental concerns “but with social conditions for sustainability: the need for equity and democracy. The debate about sustainability could be defined as the ideas that emerge when concern for the global environment and concern for social justice meet” (Dresner, 2002, p. 30).

To some extent however I recognise the distinction between sustainability and sustainable development as semantics. I recognise that above all else the phrase ‘sustainable development’ can also be defined as Robinson has distinguished ‘sustainability’ and to some extent ‘sustainable development’ has the added advantage of keeping development explicitly to the fore in a way that ‘sustainability’ can forget it.
Collaborative approaches to sustainable development and capacity building

The agenda for the twenty first century adopted by the governments attending the 1992 Earth Summit (Agenda 21) spells out again the links between environment and poverty and indicates what it termed “a defining moment in history”. These were important international agreements that sought to implement some parts of Brundtland’s recommendations. Agenda 21 said in its preamble:

1.1…We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer more prosperous future. No one nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can – in a global partnership for sustainable development. (United Nations, 1993, p. 15)

Agenda 21 section 3.7 stressed the crucial role of governments in implementing sustainable development but also emphasised that “sustainable development must be achieved at every level of society…Governments, in cooperation with appropriate international and non-governmental organizations, should support a community-driven approach to sustainability” (United Nations, 1993, p. 28). It also emphasised capacity development via national and international knowledge sharing between communities:

3.12 National capacity-building for the implementation of the above activities is crucial and should be given high priority. It is particularly important to focus capacity-building at the local level in order to support a community-driven approach to sustainability and to establish and strengthen mechanisms to allow sharing of experience and knowledge between community groups at national and international levels. (United Nations, 1993, p. 30)

There has, since the Agenda 21 agreements, been huge emphasis on community based natural resource management (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Kumar, 2005; Pretty, 1995). The new focus on all levels of society (including civil society) and national and international collaboration through a community based approach and capacity development has had some success. However, there are also some queries related to the
nature of participation encouraged in communities and whether they involve instrumental or transformational approaches.

**Complexities of the collaborative approach**

Despite apparent international agreement on a collaborative approach to sustainable development that encouraged community based natural resource management, in practice its implementation has been more difficult. This can be seen for example by subsequent critiques of firstly what is ‘community participation’ and secondly by noticeable disjunctures between global and local or recipes for policy and practice.

The notion of ‘community’ itself has been both romanticised and maligned because of the way it implies a harmonious, homogenous and territorially bound group rather than a diverse and potentially, geographically ill defined group, with common and conflicting interests (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Kumar, 2005). Related to this has been criticism of over simplistic interpretations of ‘community participation’ (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) and community ‘local knowledge’ (Sillitoe, et al., 2003). However the idea is still important and valid for seeing communities as people in interactive relationships, with common as well as potentially conflicting, interests, geographies and characteristics. This is quite distinct from an emphasis on individuals who are expected to be only self serving. As Jacobs explains the benefit of this interactive organisational form is that it recognises society as a collective organisational unit which gives meaning and purpose towards people’s true potential (Jacobs, 1995, p. 21 cited in Warburton, 1998, p. 19). In short this reinforces the importance and complexity of a relational view of development where interaction and shared meaning is key but not simple. Acknowledging and engaging sensitively with diverse community participants can provide another way of bridging the divide that can exist between experts and communities discussed by Li (2007), particularly when accountability to the
community’s diverse needs and wishes is genuinely embraced. Reframing the idea of participatory development as active citizenship has more recently helped to counter the range of critiques. It does this by explicitly acknowledging unequal power relations particularly between state agencies and civil society at the same time as the importance of mobilizing state and multilateral resources (Clarke & Missingham, 2009).

Another way of tackling the queries which have been raised about community based natural resource management approaches is to focus more on institutions (Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). Agrawal and Gibson (1999) suggest “community must be examined in the context of development and conservation by focusing on the multiple interests and actors within communities, on how these actors influence decision-making, and on the internal and external institutions that shape the decision making process” (p. 629). A focus on institutions can provide a framework that gives greater strength to local institutions and their views, concerns and preferences as well as providing greater long term sustainability, ownership and accountability than working solely with individuals. Global civil society can be part of, and interact with, institutions in a productive and transformative way through collaboration and advocacy as well as in more negative and potentially co-opted ways. For as Johnson and Wilson (2000) say “Civil society can homogenize ‘social divisions which instead need to be confronted and negotiated” (p. 1891). They stress that while voluntary action to reverse power differentials are powerful there “can be no substitute for institutional arrangements of transparency and accountability” (p. 1893).

Parallel with the debates on community based natural resource management is global environmental governance and the science that shapes it. This can be seen as a disjuncture between global science and policy and local participatory processes that
reflect local context, knowledge and practice. Fairhead and Leach (2003) highlight this tension in the case of forest research, contrasting agreements on climate change and biodiversity with sustaining local livelihoods and grassroots support for this. They say:

> Development policy is increasingly rooted in global and regional conventions and regimes, and the science that supports these is increasingly internationalized. … The tendency to ‘internationalize’ science would seem to work against moves towards decentralization, participation and the inclusion of local knowledge. (p. 1)

As a result they conclude:

> Although the international policy world revitalizes national research practices and debates, it tends to cast these within a globalised, rather than a national or local frame, and transforms their meaning in the process. (p. 2)

This tension between international agreements, science and local contextualised concerns is exemplified in more specific examples from Leech and Scoones (2003) who say:

> Long term anthropological/ecological/historical research in low income countries of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, whether concerning pastoralism, forest management, soils or water, has frequently exposed major disjunctures between the knowledge and perspectives of land users, and those underlying and reproduced through national and internationalized science and policy. (p. 5)

So while collaborative approaches to sustainable development are apparently internationally endorsed, the global science and governance processes along with their practical application on the ground can be at odds with local context, knowledge and livelihoods. This is why O’Riordan’s (1998) idea of grassroots civic science that can relate to local needs is so important. It helps counter balance the dominance of global science and knowledge on local contexts and confront what Li (2007, p. 31) terms the divide between experts and citizens by ‘learning with’. This highlights the value of having experts living and working alongside local people under local conditions in a reciprocal endeavour.
Progress towards sustainable development—integrating environment and development

Despite the recommendations of Brundtland in 1987 and the agenda for action agreed to by governments in Rio in 1992 and the 2002 follow up WSSD in Johannesburg, progress on sustainable development has been slow. A reflection of this is the “limited progress” on MDG 7 - environmental sustainability, reflected in the UN Secretary General’s latest report to the General Assembly (2010) but also demonstrated in detail by a 2007 review of 150 MDG national reports by UNDP. It is perhaps worthwhile noting that the report came from a development rather than environment focused UN agency. The report says that while all the MDGs are interdependent because they are ‘mutually reinforcing’ “MDG 7 warrants particular attention given the weaknesses both in monitoring and in overall progress” (United Nations Development Programme, 2006b, p. 10).

The report (United Nations Development Programme, 2006b) identified ‘monitoring challenges’ including:

- Unreliable and inaccessible data, a lack of statistical capacities, as well as difficulties related to lack of public awareness, legislative and regulatory frameworks, inadequate human resource capacity and the need for more partnerships (p. 9).

Also identified as obstacles to progress were differences between donor and local priorities: “Collaboration among the donor community also presents difficulties in terms of country priorities versus those of the donor community” (p. 9). These issues again emphasise the importance of capacity development and strengthening ownership and local accountability in line with priorities and realities for the local context.

From the UNDP review it was suggested that nations must adopt sustainability principles and adapt them at a practical level to suit local contexts. It said:
Countries with a clear, evidence based and widely shared vision of how they want to manage their environmental resources make the most progress toward the goal of environmental sustainability. This requires that countries do not mechanically adopt the global targets and indicators but rather link them to national development policies and priorities, local context, and ecosystem specificities. (United Nations Development Programme, 2006b, p. 9)

This provides a more locally relevant way to acknowledge contextually appropriate evidence and implement measures locally with local ownership.

The above UNDP findings are reiterated and complemented by a 2006 Sustainability Watch (2006) report by a network of African, Asian and Latin American civil society organisations which confirmed that integration of development and environment was lacking (2006, p. 9). These findings alert us to the limited reliable indicators and data on environmental sustainability and its link to poverty. Moreover, they exemplify the related problem of narrowly defined measurable MDG targets taking precedence over broader, more complex goals such as integrating sustainability principles within national policy. Despite the difficulty with implementation, there are continuing efforts to integrate poverty and environment concerns as reflected by the release of a recent UNDP manual on mainstreaming poverty and environment work (United Nations Development Programme & United Nations Environment Programme, 2009). The manual explicitly addresses the challenges and opportunities of working with government and non-government actors.

**Sustainability as a collaborative and integrating process**

Sustainability is a collaborative and integrating process not just an end goal. Plummer (2006) draws on Nelson and Eidsvik (1990) to explain that sustainable development has a simple goal of sustainability with various principles and practices that should be regarded as a process more than an endpoint. He complains about the common view of
sustainable development as an overly simplistic ‘managed’ 24 process of change to achieve sustainability (Plummer, 2006). This approach underestimates the importance of intangibles, uncertainty and flexibility and may also be implied by the attitude to the MDGs discussed earlier, where straightforward milestones become the focus at the expense of broader more integrated (but harder to measure) goals that stress the interconnections. This is clearly insufficient as the previous section on TC makes clear. It shows the benefits of a holistic, interdependent, systems approach to development, sustainability and capacity development where there is flexibility to adapt and modify actions to suit changing contexts.

It is worth reflecting on institutional arrangements for sustainability that have emphasised the individual, the state and cooperation. Plummer suggests the notion of individual rationality is linked to an individual and state view of sustainability and says Klooster and Rudd view these as:

an inferior strategy because all actions are embedded in a social context, and it is through these relational elements that a means to achieve resource sustainability is provided. (Klooster, 2000 and Rudd, 2000 cited in Plummer, 2006, p. 8)

Plummer reflects on the confluence of systems theory, holism and ecology and illustrates this with Jorgenson and Muller’s notion of an ecosystem where “the whole system is more than the sum of its parts because it is providing emergent properties” (Jorgenson and Muller, 2000, p.5 cited in Plummer, 2006, p. 9). So sustainability must not just be a state or individual matter but actively engage the social setting and the way this encourages productive synergies between people.

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24 Plummer describes management in this sense as ‘a process by which an entity advances towards a goal” (2006, p. 6)
The importance of systems thinking for development and sustainability (and the need for flexibility in approaches to learning) resonates strongly with the 2003 Institute for Development Studies (IDS) policy briefing on environmental governance in an uncertain age which concluded:

Conventional natural resource management is based on assumptions that fail to reflect the increasing complexities that characterize the world today. Focusing on uncertainties offers a way into thinking about how natural resources management needs to change. (2003, p. 4)

It reminds us that 1. “Environments are not static” hence both local and institutional coping mechanisms and new arrangements may be required to respond to the changing nature of impacts on livelihoods; 2. “Communities are rarely homogenous and institutions privilege some over others” (p. 4), as a result different interests and perceptions at a global and local level mean mutual interests should not be assumed; 3. Institutions must be re-imagined as places where real world conflicts are formally and informally resolved; 4. Resources are seen differently depending on the social and political context. As a result “the processes of power that make some definitions more dominant than others need to be understood” (p. 4); and 5. “Localization and globalization are simultaneous processes resulting in complex and contradictory trends in environmental natural resource management” (Institute of Development Studies, 2003, p. 4).

In other words simultaneous and responsive action at global and local levels is required. Natural Resource Management must acknowledge and respond to the diversity of interests and power in different contexts and in the relations between different players. Sustainability is a complex process that cannot simply be managed in a linear way towards specific goals. Because the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, like in ecosystems, a relational view is required to flexibly recognise interdependence and
adapt to diversity, uncertainty and complexity at the same time as paying attention to power differentials.

Sustainability can help frame this new relational view of development. Robinson (2004) suggests shifting from the language of “sustainable development” to the term sustainability. He regards this as more appropriate because of its implicit recognition of the importance of ‘the social constructions of sustainability’, where values considerations complement technical solutions. Robinson (2004) draws 5 key recommendations from the mixed experience with ‘sustainable development’ in the past: 1. Sustainability must be integrating over fields, sectors and scales; 2. Sustainability must encourage ‘new forms of social learning’ adapted to different social, political and environmental contexts thus encouraging an experimental and experiential focus; 3. Sustainability must complement technical responses with deeper issues of ‘opportunity, distribution, material needs, consumption and empowerment’; 4. Sustainability can expect science to inform but not solely resolve problems because different forms of knowledge (including local or indigenous knowledge) have valid locally varying value judgements and social commitments embedded in them, and these too must be open for scrutiny and understanding; 5. Sustainability requires active and ongoing engagement with relevant interests, communities and information to allow appropriate but flexible and regularly adapted responses. Robinson’s view leads us to the importance of public engagement with sustainability beyond simply experts through collaborative reciprocal and integrating processes of ‘learning with’.

**Sustainability, civic science and social learning**

Civic science and social learning provide vehicles for pursuing collaborative sustainability. Plummer is concerned with the utilitarian side of instrumental rationality that is the basis of the scientific method and paraphrasing Cortner (Cortner, 2000, p. 25
cited in Plummer, 2006) says it is “focusing on the most efficacious means to achieve given ends. Little importance is attached to the larger question of whether the ends themselves are reasonable” (p. 9). Drawing again on Cortner he says such logic can only rely on narrow technical queries while sidelining information that is not quantifiable and hence subjective, citizens’ opinions or values questions like equity (Plummer, 2006, p. 10). Plummer advocates as a response, the use of Kai Lee’s notion of civic science which he says is increasingly being practiced to “combine science and politics through the process of social learning” (p. 10) though it brings certain challenges. Cortner says “in civic science there is no set formula for a collaborative learning approach, and no standard protocols for understanding the needs, interests, and values of participants” (Cortner, 2000, p.27 cited in Plummer, 2006, p. 12).

O’Riordan (1998) paraphrases Kai Lee’s idea of civic science as an “interactive partnership between resource managers and constituent citizens’ interests in guiding a programme of environmental and social change” (p. 109). He advocates a “communal science of effective reality” where ‘scenario building’, by actively engaging interested stakeholders, is sensible and empowering as a key element of new democratic processes (p. 110).

O’Riordan describes different mutually interdependent interpretations of sustainable development including necessary constraints on markets, guiding regulations, distributional fairness and finally and most novelty what he terms ‘revelation’. This he says is “a code word for ‘going beyond empowerment’” and the others cannot be successful without it. He says “It is aimed at capturing the spirit of communal obligation and citizenship that enables individuals and groups to relate to each other’s needs”. It is, he says, “the sum of the processes for discourse and negotiation. When consensus has
been reached, initial presuppositions will have been altered, and insurmountable policy blockages or inappropriate evaluative procedures will have been exposed and addressed” (O’Riordan, 1998, p. 111). Civic science, he contends, embodies the suggestion that “there is no science outside of culture, and that different cultures interpret science in their own ways”. As a result he says the combined logic of civic science and empowerment is “the actual transfer of both respect and power to grassroots levels” (pp. 111,112). This might be seen as a deeper view of what is required for authentic participation and partnership and being responsive to different cultural contexts as discussed earlier. It transcends narrow instrumental approaches to participation to encourage transformation of people and structural problems through social learning and action. The transformative value of respectful grassroots engagement through avenues like civic science is equivalent to what Smith and Yanacopulos (2004) say about creating a ‘public face for development’. They said in a special edition of the Journal of International Development, that everyday citizens who have come to understand life in another country of the South may provide a key element in the ‘public face’ of development which can help catalyse change in the North.

**Instrumental and transformational approaches to participation for sustainability**

So as we have seen, sustainability must be integrating, collaborative and use both technical and community knowledge. Does this rule out more ‘instrumental’ roles such as those linked to ‘development as practice’ or ‘practical improvement’? The commonly assumed dichotomy between ‘instrumental’ and ‘transformative’ approaches to participation for sustainability can be considered by examining experiences of voluntary biological monitoring (VBM) (Lawrence, 2006). Lawrence cites a number of VBM examples including the experience of Citizens’ Environmental Watch in Canada which had problems with the water quality data collected by its volunteers. The university academics involved had to consider a compromise between educating and
empowering the volunteers and obtaining high quality data. As a result, they changed from use of chemical to biological indicators. As Lawrence (2006) summarises, the academics were not aiming to empower but by choosing a better learning method as a way of also gathering data they needed, the result was a successful environmental and community outcome. This sort of partnership between academics and citizens, she says, shows the coexistence of different types of participation that can be mutually reinforcing, quite distinct from the simple ladder typology which would have labelled them simply instrumental or transformative.

Lawrence says the above examples demonstrate that dichotomies like ‘personal-versus-public value’ must make way for a more interactive process involving subjective and objective, data and experience, personal activities and contributions to the making of decisions (p. 293). She concludes that rather than having to choose between a binary of quality data or stronger citizens both are possible because: “structure, collective agency and individual agency all interact” (p. 295).

This approach reminds us that environment and development or technical and relational approaches should not be regarded as binaries. Instead the environment must be reconsidered not simply as an important sectoral priority to be combined with development a la Rio summit, but as a fundamental link between the survival issues of poverty, justice and environment through the integrating concept of sustainability. In O’Riordan’s (1998) terms, this can encourage a sustainability transition through a spirit of communal obligation where people genuinely relate to each other’s needs. This is in great contrast to rich Northerner’s pursuing individual consumption at the expense of meaning, global poverty, inequality and environmental destruction as highlighted by Peter Singer, the New Economics Foundation and the UK Sustainable Development

**Responding to our global predicament**

So how do we respond to our current global predicament? The preceding sections have given an assessment of the predicament and measures that have gained some consensus as appropriate responses. So far they may lack actual endorsement or genuine implementation at the highest levels (perhaps at their heart because they are too challenging to the status quo). But these elements are what I think is required for the changes we need to achieve the broader development goals I have advocated. At its most obvious, it requires a shift to a relational ontology that will best foster authentic partnerships and individual and collective agency for practical and structural change for development globally, often through indirect means.

The shift to a relational ontology requires renewed individual and collective agency in the midst of adversity. Franck Amalric (2000) suggests ‘concerned individuals’ are overwhelmed by globalisation as an inevitable process they have little control over. He says “Renewed global cooperation and solidarity is widely recognized as needed but it is unclear how this is to come about” (p. 112). He says it is conceptually short sighted to expect justice simply through concepts that arise from the nation state and requires more innovative approaches such as through trans-national justice. He endorses the alternative proposed by Sen (1999) that we:

Pose the issue of justice—and that of fairness—in several distinct though inter-related domains involving various groups that cut across national boundaries. These groups need not be as universally grand as the collectivity of ‘all’ the people in the world nor as specific and constrained as national states. There are many policy issues that cannot be reasonably addressed in either of these two extremist formats. (p. 22)
We can respond, according to Amalric, by recognising the ‘channels of external impact’ North-South where different criteria of justice can be applied and different types of solidarity enacted. He categorises the channels in three groups as “multilateral organizations; foreign and development cooperation policies; and the external impact of internal policies and practices” (p. 7). Amalric also identifies cross cutting challenges for the North as ‘transparency’, ‘accountability in decision making’, and ‘over capacity of production’ which I have addressed earlier in terms of the problems of TA, the Paris Principles of aid effectiveness and impact of over consumption. The second challenge is of particular interest to me for the development context because it addresses the potential gulf between people who make decisions and those who are most affected by those decisions. This is exactly the sort of dilemma that occurs when technical or scientific solutions are imposed and lack local understanding because the decision makers do not live with the consequences of their actions. This he says can be at the level of external impacts that result from national policy including foreign affairs where citizens have little direct interest, fail to prioritise this or are dominated by a small minority as with agricultural subsidies (Amalric, 2000, p. 9). This gulf is also illustrated by responses of denial about climate change documented with regard to Norwegian communities by Norgard (2006) who says:

Wealthy people are protected from full knowledge of many environmental and other social problems by national borders, gated communities, segregated neighborhoods, and their own fine-tuned yet unconscious practices of not noticing, looking the other way, and normalizing disturbing information. (p. 366)

What is required is “the possibility to change decisions that are detrimental to third parties independently of the normal democratic decision making process, in ways that constitutional oversight or judicial power provides” (Amalric, 2000, p. 10). Almaric says multilateral organisations were partly created to limit unilateral prejudicial acts by
one state over another but that this is not sufficient. His alternate proposal is

independent national institutions:

which would embody the principle that society cannot be organized in ways
that impose costs on others outside national jurisdiction. Such an
institutional arrangement would ensure the responsibility of northern states
and individuals towards other states and (their individuals’) economic,
environmental and social needs. (p. 10)

To do this at a distance is very difficult. Such institutions would require local and global
grounding and people to people interaction across both these levels as the IDS (2003)
paper on global governance suggested.

What I am advocating is a different contextualised vision for what has been
international development focused on transfer and technical solutions over politics and
people. This is an opportunity and a challenge for trans-national civil society where
reciprocity and social learning demonstrate the interconnected nature of problems and
solutions in our contemporary world. The question is who or what are appropriate actors
or institutions to respond to this challenge and this thesis considers the work of long
terms international volunteers for development and sustainability to see if they are fit
for this purpose.

Trans-national civil society institutions and networks are able to contribute to domain
learning despite not having the resources of the corporate players or the authority of
says collective change is linked implicitly to personal change so that people behave
consistently with their principles. He says
the shift from overemphasising ‘development as practice’, transfer and technical
solutions:

requires action in all of the areas in which...development NGOs have been
found wanting – levelling the playing field, empowering Southern voices,
building constituencies for changes in global consumption and production patterns, and injecting real accountability into the system, including personal accountability for the choices that NGOs make. The struggle for global civil society can’t be separated from the struggle for personal change, since it is those changes that underpin the most difficult decision to hand over control, share power, and live a life that is consistent with our principles. (p. 49)

Five trans-national civil society roles can be identified ranging from “identifying emerging issues” to “facilitating grassroots voice”, “building bridges to link diverse stakeholders”, “amplifying the public visibility and importance of issues” and “monitoring problem-solving performance” (L. D. Brown & Timmer, 2006, p. 6). Brown and Timmer link these not just to individual or institutional learning but social learning across domains. This means going beyond ‘first order learning’ characterised by immediate performance improvements to include broader ‘second order learning’ that may not just improve domain performance but push on to question and revise the frames and goals of the domain (p. 3). This provides opportunities for small scale and large scale change from the personal to the political and global.

The importance of civil society received new prominence in the lead up to the Third High Level Forum on aid Effectiveness in Accra Ghana in late 2008 compared to the 1st and 2nd High level Forums in Rome and Paris when civil society organisations were only minimally included (OECD, 2009a). The Accra Agenda for Action on aid effectiveness (OECD, 2008c) committed to work with CSOs to “provide an enabling environment that maximizes their contributions to development” (p. 19). The Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness (AG-CS) was created in official OECD recognition that: “Other stakeholders have much to learn from civil society “ and “bringing CSOs on board can help to enrich and deepen the aid effectiveness agenda, with increased attention to human rights and social justice” (OECD, 2009a, p. 125) . The Advisory Group specifically called on “all development actors to recognize”:
The importance and diversity of civil society and of CSOs as political and development actors in their own right; that CSOs as development actors have distinctive and legitimate contributions to make to development and aid effectiveness, and that their efforts complement the efforts of other development partners. [my emphasis] (OECD, 2009a, p. 126)

Clearly civil society has a distinctive, legitimate and complementary role with other development actors in achieving sustainability. As discussed earlier Robinson (2004) draws five key recommendations for sustainability from the mixed experience with ‘sustainable development’ in the past. To demonstrate the potential synergy I have placed his recommendations in a table showing civil society volunteer application of sustainability through volunteers, as will be seen in more concrete detail in Chapter Four on international volunteer cooperation.
Table 2: Sustainability and international volunteers for development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Robinson’s recommendations (Robinson, 2004)</th>
<th>Potential International Volunteer application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Sustainability must be integrating over fields, sectors and scales.</td>
<td>Volunteers work for local hosts on their specific priorities and at a range of levels also providing a bridging role internally and between people, institutions and countries/cultures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sustainability must encourage ‘new forms of social learning’ adapted to different social, political and environmental contexts thus encouraging an experimental and experiential focus.</td>
<td>Despite their technical proficiency, volunteers are often new to the development context they are invited into. This and the IVCO framework (including local accountability) encourages them to learn about the new context and adapt and combine their knowledge with local insights to generate new responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Sustainability must complement technical responses with deeper issues of ‘opportunity, distribution, material needs, consumption and empowerment’.</td>
<td>Volunteers live and work alongside local people under local direction, using their skills as well as experiencing local limitations in conditions and resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sustainability can expect science to inform but not solely resolve problems because different forms of knowledge (including local or indigenous knowledge) have valid locally varying value judgements and social commitments embedded in them, and these too must be open for scrutiny and understanding.</td>
<td>Working in local structures and often more closely with grassroots communities volunteers have opportunities to experience local knowledge and culture. The IVCO ethos and support also encourages volunteers to ‘live, work and learn’ and appreciate cross cultural exchange not just focus on technical transfer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sustainability requires active and ongoing engagement with relevant interests, communities and information to allow appropriate but flexible and regularly adapted responses.</td>
<td>Volunteers are requested by local entities and managed by them. By being locally responsible, they are more able to adapt to local change rather than be stuck with outdated external terms of reference as local conditions and needs evolve.</td>
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</table>

**Conclusion**

Through this chapter we see that to achieve development technical solutions and poverty reduction alone are insufficient. Beyond that inequality and injustice must be tackled in ways that are genuinely collaborative, participatory and accountable to all...
stakeholders. This is why a relational approach to development is required, one that integrates sustainable practices at all levels, encouraging all actors to share knowledge and learning to create transformational change. This view grounds the direction of this thesis and helps frame the research questions.

Sustainability allows us to consider individuals, institutions and contexts in the North (with their positive and negative global impacts) as well as those in the South and the East. International volunteers provide one valuable tool to encourage exchange across and within these boundaries without the simple value judgements implied by aid, because volunteering is a reciprocal endeavour. Long term international volunteering may foster dealing in a relational way with symptoms and causes of global problems beyond just blaming or stereotyping one side or the other. It may also be crucial in empowering everyday individuals in the North and the South to work for positive change and development and against negative impacts at home and abroad, collectively and individually. In other words long term international volunteering may help people in the North and the South to rediscover and consolidate personal and institutional agency amidst our globalised world and the structural impediments that constrain this. The next chapter looks specifically at one particular expression of trans-national civil society, namely international volunteers and the International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations that facilitate their work for development. It looks at the possible match between what this chapter has discussed as essential considerations for development today and how international volunteers and their IVCOs may suit the relational view of development that has been articulated.
Chapter 4: Volunteers, international volunteers and the IVCOs

This chapter introduces the independent international volunteer cooperation agencies (IVCOs) and discusses what distinguishes them through their history, evolution, philosophy and practice from other international development organisations. It complements Chapter Three in responding to research question one, reviewing the current context for development theory and practice and how the concept of sustainability and the role of long term international volunteers for development and sustainability fit into this setting. The chapter begins with some consolidation of the discussion about volunteering begun in Chapter One before looking more specifically at individual IVCOs to gain a detailed and historical insight into why and how they work in development through volunteers, including discussion of their connection to civil society through governance and other structures. An in depth insight into the work of the IVCOs provides a solid grounding for assessing in Chapters Five and Six the actual work they facilitate through international volunteers. This explanation is particularly pertinent given the importance highlighted by Simpson of a social justice pedagogy in order to avoid common pitfalls of commercial volunteer sending agencies (Simpson, 2004).

This thesis is fundamentally about the role of international volunteers in development. It is important therefore to consider the nature of IVCOs and illustrate the framework that independent IVCOs, provide for their international volunteers in development. It is this framework that sets the tone for the partnership between IVCOs and local hosts as well as the practical expectations and preparation of volunteers and their local host institutions. The framework also structures the ongoing collaboration, and interaction between institutions, IVCOs and volunteers and between volunteers and local host
institutions. The IVCO framework is primarily development focused but identifies international volunteering as the main strategy to achieve this. However, to suggest that volunteering simply plays an instrumental role to achieve development outcomes is to oversimplify the case. This is similar to saying that international volunteers ‘do development’ solely to gain fulfilling and rewarding volunteer opportunities and further their own CVs, regardless of what local people need and want or already bring to the table themselves (in terms of knowledge, skills and experience). This has been an emerging and understandable criticism of commercially oriented gap year and volunteer tourism (Simpson, 2004; Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006b).

An awareness of the independent IVCOs that have chosen to promote the use of international volunteers as ‘value adding’ for their development work helps ground an understanding of the niche of international volunteers. I regard independent IVCOs as those that are not controlled or managed by national governments or religious authorities; thus do not consider either national volunteer agencies like Peace Corps or traditional missionary endeavours though these provide opportunities for further research by others. This chapter on independent IVCOs and their history and evolution first discusses IVCOs in the context of other development NGOs and then quotes some historical perspectives on the IVCO niche. It concludes with examples from a number of prominent independent IVCOs that have given access to some of their volunteers for the research, to demonstrate common but subtly diverse elements that unite them in their aim of facilitating development through international volunteering. These elements include development visions, values, strategies and governance, the practical side of living conditions for volunteers and volunteer requirements; and some volunteer statistics to give a sense of scale and realism. These elements are used to demonstrate
and analyse IVCO commonalities with as well as differences from other development NGOs.

**Definitions of volunteers and international volunteers**

While popular images of volunteers may focus on a specific individual service, such as looking after the sick or elderly, this is only one of many possible volunteer roles today. The historical evolution in perception, practice and philosophy of volunteers has meant greater recognition of a diversity of understandings about volunteering work. These can now encompass reciprocity as well as ‘helping’, capacity development beyond charity, professionalism in addition to well meaning unskilled labour, at the same time as dealing with causes and symptoms. These notions of volunteering as building solidarity and empowerment and supporting local ownership and values may also be regarded today as capacity development.

In his paper “On Volunteering and Social Development”, Davis Smith suggested a framework for defining and understanding the meaning of volunteering (United Nations Volunteers, 2001). It depended on the setting and a typology of volunteering clarified on the basis of the final outcome or purpose. He identified four basic types of voluntary activity: mutual aid or self help; philanthropy or service to others, participation; and advocacy. The typology was particularly interesting from a development perspective in its acknowledgement of mutual aid or self help. In the North this might not be considered typically a volunteer activity (though Davis Smith gives the example of self help groups), while in the developing world it is recognised for the social and economic support it provides for a high proportion of the population. Equally the typology recognised advocacy—a now common form of voluntary action particularly for
challenging causes of problems rather than symptoms (as for example with the recent Make Poverty History Campaign). Davis Smith’s broad approach is indicative of the growing consideration of the cultural basis of volunteering as discussed by Dekker and Halman (2003). Explicit consideration of this cultural basis in the context of international volunteering for development would be very fruitful but is beyond the scope of this current research.

The national volunteer\textsuperscript{26} sector often still distances itself from the international volunteers’ area because of a sense that the two are referring to different key characteristics in ‘their’ volunteers. In the North or Western countries, national volunteers have most commonly been considered part time and unpaid and within a formal work environment, while in the South part time and partly paid within informal settings have been more characteristic (Anheier & Salamon, 1999, p. 6). ‘Volunteering’ has also been contrasted with ‘service’ in public discourse under four main groupings as “someone who freely becomes involved, without remuneration, in informal activities on behalf of strangers” (Perry & Imperial, 2001, p. 469). Defining volunteerism by the four criteria of free choice, remuneration, structure and intended beneficiaries, Perry & Imperial (2001) distinguish service as more intense activities on more difficult, intractable, public problems. Furthermore they say: “formality, some type of remuneration, and the prospect for self development mark many service programs” (p. 496). Long term international volunteers for development (who volunteer full time and receive some living allowance) do not seem to fit the above Anheir and Salamon definition, though they have elements of each by nature of being paid something, being full time and within a formal structured work environment. International volunteers fit much more into Perry and Imperial’s ‘service’ notion despite the ‘volunteer’ tag,

\textsuperscript{26} National volunteers may be categorised as those volunteering in their own country.
including the aspiration of self development. As a result they illustrate the confusion about nomenclature of what IVCOs call international volunteers for development, which has exacerbated difficulties of comparison as highlighted by many writers (Cnaan, et al., 1996).

A broader definition can be identified that includes the two ideals of service and volunteering together in a meaningful way and some people endorse and encourage this broader definition. The UNDP (2003) publication Essentials on “Volunteerism and Development” talks about key universal principles of volunteerism as follows: actions are carried out freely and without coercion, financial gain is not the main motivating principle, and there is a beneficiary other than the volunteer (p. 2). There is also a growing body of literature on international volunteers that emerges from the volunteer or service research area and this also recognises the international volunteer for development experience (Davis Smith, et al., 2005; M. S. Sherraden, Lough, & Moore McBride, 2008; M. S. Sherraden, et al., 2006).

In other words there is some diversity in language about volunteering with some people equating it with service and others suggesting service implies a more intensive commitment but there is clearly room to bring them together. Sherraden (2001) defines service as “an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognised and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (p. 1). More recently the term ‘international voluntary service’ was proposed for use in the international context to exclude mandatory forms of national and other service (M. S. Sherraden, et al., 2006, p. 165). International Volunteer Sending Agencies have used the term volunteering more than service and in fact the Australian IVCO Overseas Service Bureau, chose to change its
name to Australian Volunteers International in the late 1990s in order to highlight the word ‘volunteer’ and the creative tension it brings with it.

**International volunteers research and theory**

Perry and Imperial (2001) state how “the multidisciplinary scope of service-related research is a strong indicator that a distinct field of research may be emerging albeit one that is fragmented and disjointed” (p. 466). It therefore is clear that the multidisciplinary context cultivates a broad range of views as well as narrower areas of more disciplinary interest. Perry and Imperial suggest these range from psychologists focusing on elements like individual server motivations and competencies; to educators interested in appropriate pedagogy for educational service delivery; and sociologists and political scientists emphasising the impacts on society or the served. The meagre number of studies addressing stipended service is evident as well as the interesting contrasts that such analysis may provide to non stipended service (p. 468). Long term stipended international volunteering compared to more conventional informal and part time non stipended volunteering is an example of this. We also can conclude with them that transformational service may occur even if volunteers’ motivations are changing over time and little is known about this dynamic (p. 470).

**Who are the IVCOs?**

IVCOs\textsuperscript{27} may be defined as organisations that “send and/or receive international volunteers” (M. S. Sherraden, et al., 2006, p. 172). Though the IVCOs I discuss regard themselves more as senders or facilitators than receivers who they classify more commonly as ‘hosts’ or ‘local hosts’. These agencies may be divided according to whether their volunteers primarily contribute to development and relief or international

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\textsuperscript{27} Sherraden et al. actually use the term International Voluntary Service Organizations in their paper because they regard service as a more intensive form of volunteering. I have equated the two together here in keeping with the earlier discussion of volunteering and service that showed service in this sense, equated well with international volunteering. I also like to use the IVCO term because it is the common term used by volunteer agencies themselves and I want this research to be as useful and accessible as possible to them.
understanding (M. S. Sherraden, et al., 2006) however this thesis regards both as central to international volunteers’ effective role and appropriate niche. The development focused agencies may be broadly divided into three groups:

A. National government volunteer cooperation agencies who are structurally connected to or part of a National government, for example US Peace Corps, the Norwegian Fredskorpset or Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) which is part of the official Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA);

B. National or international companies who manage volunteer programs as part of international development contracting for governments, for example ‘Australian Managing Contractor’ Austraining; and

C. NGO and independent IVCOs that may be national, international or multinational for example UK founded VSO, Australian Volunteers International, or UN Volunteers. I also include Progressio although it is linked to the Catholic church but does not recruit its volunteers under any religious criteria only development skills.

Forum was formed in 1964 as “an organization for European based international volunteering agencies” (International FORUM on Development Service, 2009a). In 2000 it became the International FORUM on Development Service: “a network of organisations engaged in international volunteering and personnel exchange” (International FORUM on Development Service, 2009a). Its membership “is open to non-profit organisations, including NGOs and state bodies, that are actively engaged in development service” (International FORUM on Development Service, 2009b). Forum, 28

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28 I have included UN Volunteers alongside NGOs as an independent IVCO. Though it could be called a multinational IVCO I have sided with Weyers in quoting a UNITAR report by Smith and Verhagen. They state: “An intergovernmental organization (IGO) is not a government, but is simply a special kind of voluntary association whose members happen to be governments rather than other kinds of organizations or individuals. Ultimately it has perhaps more in common with both international NGOs and national trans-nationally oriented NGOs than with national governments” (DH Smith, Verhagen et al. 1978 cited in Weyers, 1981, p. 228).
since 2002, has been organising the annual meeting of heads of ‘International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations’ (IVCOs). An appreciation of Forum’s membership and attendance at the annual IVCO meeting it organises, gives a rough indication of the core group of the international volunteering for development sector, although there are many other smaller organisations that operate to a lesser extent in this area. In 2006 Forum had 13 members but some of these members were national umbrella organisations for example, the British Volunteer Agencies Liaison Group consisting of VSO, Skillshare, Progressio and International Service; and the Canadian international Volunteer Cooperation Agencies group which has 9 members. The 2006 IVCO meeting had over 20 individual groups represented including the national government linked Korean agency KOICA; US Peace Corps; Germany’s DED; Norwegian Fredskorpset and Japan’s JOCV and the independent IVCOs UN Volunteers; Australia’s AVI; UK’s VSO, Progressio and Skillshare International, Canada’s CCI, CUSO, and CECI; New Zealand’s VSA and Denmark’s MS.

Government support to IVCOs has unquestionably allowed a larger scale and broader participation than would have been possible for individuals or organisations without it. The costs of fielding a long term international volunteer for one to two years are inevitably significant given the need for airfares, accommodation, living costs and insurance (though their costs are a small proportion of comparable TA). There is and always has been however significant disquiet that “such support maintain, not compromise, the spirit, freedom, and apolitical objectives that have characterized private efforts” (Morris, 1973, p. 8). Glyn Roberts stated that it was impossible that a volunteer agency “sponsored and controlled by a rich country government can be other than neo-colonialist” (Morris, 1973, p. 8). However in terms of inclusivity of volunteering, a concern raised by some writers (Amin, 1999; McBride, Sherraden, &
Lough, 2007), government funding to IVCOs has to some extent ensured that long term volunteering for development was accessible to ordinary people who would not otherwise be able to survive independently overseas for one to two years. If this has been commonly the case for those with appropriate expertise and considering international volunteering from the North, it is obviously much more pertinent for those from the South who are increasingly recruited. This issue was quite explicitly addressed when UNV was established, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

My research is largely focused on the third group of NGO and independent organisations, which may also be considered part of the “third sector” as “organizations which are neither part of the state nor part of the business sector” (D. Lewis, 1999a, p. 2) and hence distinguish themselves from the first two IVCO categories mentioned earlier. While the independent IVCOs are not part of government, they generally receive some level of government funding to assist their work but generally avoid overt government control and are primarily accountable to their NGO community base. This may range from 30 to 90% government funding (Lucas, 2004). The independent IVCOs are explicitly not for profit organisations. I have also included in the research one company Austraining from the second category given their importance in the Australian international volunteer sector, their focus on youth and their willingness to be part of my research.

Lewis (1999a) suggests academic research into third sector organisations can be divided into two broad categories: “work which focuses on these organizations and their activities in industrialized countries, and work which examines related types of organizations in developing or aid recipient countries” (p. 2). He says the first area covers research on what is often “termed ‘voluntary’, ‘non-profit’ or third sector
organizations working in Western industrialized societies” and the second is a “growing set of interdisciplinary writings within development studies that has concerned itself with the role of NGOs in development” (p. 2). My research is focused on the IVCOs that are part of this latter group of NGOs in development.

**Independent IVCOs and other development NGOs**

In this section I discuss the situation of the IVCOs within the development NGO grouping as opposed to the North’s broader ‘non profit’ sector working at a national level. There is some overlap and interaction at a broad level and that can be seen as fitting under the banner of trans-national civil society roles.

Brown and Timmer (2006) delineate 5 trans-national civil society roles: “identifying emerging issues; facilitating grassroots voices; building bridges to link diverse stakeholders; amplifying the public visibility and importance of issues; and monitoring problem-solving performance” (p. 6). They show that “civil society actors can facilitate engagements among complementary resources that enable domain learning that cannot be accomplished by a single level sector or country” (p. 6). Development NGOs generally and IVCOs in particular clearly see themselves as playing some or all of these roles depending on the context but there may be some suggestion that IVCOs have a particular opportunity or necessity to do this because they facilitate volunteers to work with separate local organisations.

Canadian Crossroads International and Norway’s Fredskorpset have been particularly innovative with ways of bringing citizens together in North and South and from North and South, with a development and civil society focus. This experience is helping shape future directions and models for the IVCOs (Allum, 2007).
Historically IVCOs have often been seen as separate from development NGOs because of their emphasis on volunteering. While independent IVCOs were not always considered development NGOs, they certainly can for the most part be regarded today as development NGOs using Lewis’s definition\textsuperscript{29}. He describes development NGOs as ‘NGOs’ which “are neither government nor commercial businesses and are linked with the international development community of organizations and institutions—the aid industry” (D. Lewis, 1998, p. 509). Depending on geographic considerations they may also be considered part of the “third sector”, “voluntary sector” or “charity sector.

Overall, in the same way that international volunteers do not fit neatly in the same basket as national volunteers (as discussed earlier), IVCOs have generally found they sat more comfortably with other development organisations\textsuperscript{30} rather than alongside national volunteer agencies and their umbrella organisations. For example AVI has been for many years an active member of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA-now ACFID) with its CEO even ACFOA president for a number of years. IVCOs do however collaborate with national volunteer agencies where feasible and mutually beneficial, for example in the celebration of international volunteers day or national volunteer week.

In 2004 the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) made a positive submission to AusAID about the development of its ‘Volunteer Program Policy’. In the submission ACFOA indicated public support and recognition from the Australian development NGO sector, perhaps demonstrating publicly for the first time that it considered international volunteering a valid contribution to the development sector. The submission explained that ACFOA’s own NGO effectiveness research had identified

\textsuperscript{29} For example Progressio specifically describes itself as an “international development agency” and VSO calls itself an “international development charity”.

\textsuperscript{30} However other development organisations have not necessarily been comfortable to the same degree with IVCOs as development NGOs and this will be discussed later.
five key components and concluded they were all strongly reflected in Australian volunteer sending agency programs. The five key components were “high quality relationships based on mutual trust and respect; long term engagement; learning; adaptation, working together and risk taking” (Australian Council for Overseas Aid, 2004, p. 4).

There has been a long history of development NGOs beginning perhaps as early as the anti slave trade movements (Charnovitz, 1997). However before the 1980s there was little discussion of the role of development NGOs in academic literature and the small amount that existed focused on humanitarian organisations that were not seen as contributing to mainstream development (D. Lewis, 2001, p. 29). Some well known development NGO examples include: Save the Children Fund which was established in 1919, Oxfam in 1942 and CARE in 1946 (though Charnovitz (1997) goes back much further). NGO recognition in the development sector increased in the late 1980s and 1990s to the point from the mid 1990s that governments and multilateral institutions regarded NGOs as important players in development (Brodhead, 1987, p. 1).

Development NGOs\textsuperscript{31} can be divided into Northern development NGOS (NNGOs) and Southern development NGOs (SNGOs). The independent IVCOs can be considered, in the majority, Northern development NGOs given they have their roots in industrialised countries but undertake development work in aid recipient countries (D. Lewis, 1998, p. 503).

Before the 1980s many NNGOs implemented their own development projects and many used Northern expatriate staff to do this (D. Lewis, 1998, p. 503). Some NGOs

\textsuperscript{31}Alan Fowler describes development NGOs as NGDOs which differentiates them from NGOs working in other areas but the term NGOs is more commonly assumed to be about development NGOs particularly when used in a development context as in this thesis.
gradually changed their approach so that local Southern partner organisations were chosen to implement the work on the ground with funding and support from NNGOs. This has been seen by some, as contrasting with those IVCOs which largely continued to send, until relatively recently, volunteers from the North to work in the South.

Two large NNGOs Oxfam Australia and World Vision Australia exemplify common NNGOs who distinguish their approach from NGOs using international volunteers for development. On their websites they clarify that volunteering in Australia for their organisations is encouraged but that this does not extend to opportunities overseas. Oxfam Australia states:

Volunteering overseas: We do not have an overseas volunteer program, as we support the work of local people and organisations overseas – encouraging local participation and building local capacity. (Oxfam Australia, 2006).

World Vision Australia similarly says:

Volunteering overseas: Our policy is for World Vision overseas development projects to be managed and operated in partnership with the local community, so we do not have overseas volunteer positions. We try to recruit qualified local staff because they speak the same language and understand the culture of their people. Their appointment also develops local skills and national leadership. (World Vision Australia, 2006)

These statements may be seen as an oblique critique of international volunteering but they are also a practical strategy by development NGOs to deal with requests from the public for ‘hands on’ involvement in their programs. The statements clearly inform the public that for these agencies development is not to be achieved through direct action overseas by supporters. In this sense their approach can be considered good professional development practice because it does not unleash well meaning but inappropriate and ‘unrequested’ volunteers on local agencies or communities. However, in this way a direct relationship and sense of solidarity may be circumvented because of the perceived and real danger of paternalism. Such agencies seek to engage their supporters in other
ways. For example World Vision has a child sponsorship program that on all accounts is extremely successful as a fundraising tool and is probably for many people premised on the idea that they can feel their contribution makes a difference through the communication they receive from their sponsored child. The connection between donor and child is so real (for example it may include correspondence between child/his family and donor), it makes for a greater practical concern over what is happening in the child’s community or country rather than just seeing it on the news and knowing about it in a detached way. However the power relation inherent in this interaction between benefactor and child/family or local community has been challenged as a potentially stigmatising, stereotyping and patronising interaction (Stalker, 1982). As a result, groups like World Vision have become more careful about how they manage and promote child sponsorship in recent years, while finding the lucrative nature of this style of fundraising hard to abandon altogether.

Oxfam Australia has been renowned over the years for engaging grassroots supporters through community groups for development education, fundraising for specific countries or projects and advocacy. Over the last twenty years this has continued but is increasingly complemented by more encouragement of individual giving and lobbying around organisationally prioritised projects, programs and advocacy as part of an efficient and effective global coordination of national Oxfams through Oxfam International. Oxfam Australia retains however a priority on supporting, through its overseas offices, local partner organisations which implement the work on the ground.

However for some NGOs, their overseas offices may function more as locally staffed subcontractors for the NNGO than genuinely autonomous local organisations focused on local priorities (R. Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2010). These locally based
intermediaries may then fund local organisations but again usually in keeping with accountability to the NNGO. Fowler (1998b) says “existing evidence indicates that many southern and eastern development NGOs (NGDOs) have indeed originally simply “mirrored” or cloned their northern counterparts, acting as “transmission belts for service delivery” (p. 203). He says there is some evidence from NGDO roots and behaviour of cultural imperialism. In this way, NNGOs may co-opt local leaders transforming them into their functionaries administering projects that do not respond to structural problems of recipient countries (Petras & Veltmeyer, 2002, p. 288). This sort of criticism then lends itself to the negative critique that such NGOs are solely ‘ladles for the global soup kitchen’ (Fowler, 1995).

As is clear from the earlier quotes from Oxfam and World Vision, NGOs’ current style of working through local people and organisations has included a focus on partnership, accompaniment and capacity building. These principles are very important; however, their actual form of implementation is not necessarily without queries either (Fowler, 1998a; D. Lewis, 1998). David Lewis (1998), for example, found from NGO research in Bangladesh that “partnership is a complex concept understood differently by organizations which have unequal power” (p. 504). He criticised the potential paternalism of NNGOs ‘capacity building’ SNGOs through one-way transfer of skills and expertise and suggested that NNGOS might do better to help facilitate South-South capacity building given the success of some Southern NGOs like BRAC and GRAMEEN in Bangladesh. Moreover, he suggested there were opportunities for NNGOS to build their own capacity through their collaboration with SNGOs. Lewis suggests the new and broader local relationships required in this changing context put pressure on NNGOs to find different ways of working but with this there was a danger they may lose the support from the public in the North who favour the “hands on”
approach (Fowler, 2000; D. Lewis, 1998, p. 507; Malhotra, 2000). These critiques of a lack of support from NNGOs for genuine local expressions of civil society and downward accountability are increasingly expressed despite some evident innovation for example in structure by Actionaid or on the ground work by Oxfam, and public advocacy for global justice by both (R. Bennett & Ali-Choudhury, 2010; Edwards, 2008; Roche, 2009).

In parallel with the focus on partnership, accompaniment and capacity development, there have been increasing moves by Northern funding agencies like the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency or AusAID to directly fund SNGOs rather than support them solely via NNGOs as in the past. This demonstrates that funding agencies have in the past partly seen the NNGOs as just effective conduits for delivering aid rather than seeing their broader support role for SNGOs as part of work to strengthen civil society. After their review of NGO funding in Bangladesh, David Lewis and Babar Sobhan (1999) made a number of recommendations to NNGOs concluding with a call to raise and broaden accountability by making partnerships reliant on trust rather than resource transfer. They suggest:

NNGOs can raise the level of accountability of official development assistance by making connections between issues which are important in both Northern and Southern contexts (such as environmental pollution, women’s rights, deforestation, corruption, and the effects of privatization). The growth of direct funding of SNGOs by donors therefore provides a useful opportunity to rethink the form and style of funding relationships along with NGO approaches. There is a growing responsibility for NGOs and donors to build a more genuine form of partnership, which may not in future include financial resource transfers, around a greater level of trust. (p. 128)

IVCOs have generally based their partnerships with Southern organisations on the provision of volunteer personnel rather than resource transfers. For many IVCOs the volunteer provision is complemented with limited financial support or assistance with networking and lobbying on issues of mutual concern.
Critics have argued that the idea of sending to the South a skilled international volunteer from outside (these days from North or South) can be paternalistic and hence the cautious statement from Australian NGOs earlier. This is indeed possible particularly if the volunteer is not requested locally or does not bring something different to locally available skills and experience. However international volunteers usually are requested for their expertise by local organisations and work directly within their management structure and on a day to day basis do as they are directed. In other words the international volunteer is primarily accountable to the local organisation and then to the Northern IVCO that facilitates the assignment (even if this is changing to some extent with moves to a more programmatic and outcome focused approach as will be discussed later). This reality challenges the assertion of paternalism in international volunteering particularly if there is also an IVCO aim to advocate for global structural change beyond the global soup kitchen, using the volunteer as a catalyst for this.

In the 1970s Irene Pinkau uniquely evaluated ‘volunteer development services’ based in 15 countries culminating in a three volume report entitled “Service for Development”. Pinkau's (1977) study covered four main categories including training and employment schemes, study services, social and technical services and finally foreign volunteer services; her findings were significant. From her assessment she concluded that:

Volunteer development services are non elitist in contrast to many voluntary organizations which focus on charity and involve the affluent… problem solving in Volunteers Development Services means modifying or eliminating underlying causes. (Pinkau, 1981, p. 61)

Irene Pinkau (1981) identified that in part the perceived need for international volunteer development services emerges from a lack of Northern knowledge and understanding of the South and its culture as well as a moral concern to assist people in the South and create peace among countries and peoples. She concluded that:
The major objectives of Foreign Volunteer Development Services are not only to provide skilled manpower for development projects and to participate in international cooperation for development, but also to learn from other cultures and from work experience in foreign settings and to promote understanding among the peoples of cooperating countries. (p. 66)

Pinkau hence supports the earlier suggestion that in terms of international volunteers for development and international understanding, it is not an either or proposition but rather they must go hand in hand.

Pinkau (1981) identified an important breadth of volunteer services that might distinguish them from other development NGOs. She suggested that again, contrary to popular conceptions of development agencies aiming to ‘put themselves out of business’ through the ‘narrow’ goal of eliminating poverty in the South, Volunteer Development Services have the permanent aspiration for the participation of all citizens at home and abroad in improving society at a local and global level. Pinkau supported the suggestion that volunteers have a significant role to play as both technical assistance providers and what might be termed ‘community cultural development agents’ who also have a role in global learning, advocacy and networking. She said:

When VDS were established in the beginning of the development era one thought of them as a way to aid the poor. They were perceived as helping to solve a problem with an end in sight. Today we know differently. Development Services have participated in and contributed to societal change. With others, they have entered a new era and have a full task ahead to improve, expand and grow as organizations for recurrent education, employment facilitation, and the participation of citizens in development. They are no longer a limited outsider organization set up to fill a current gap, but are cultural institutions in their own right, helping to guide the growth of their own societies and that of the global community. (Pinkau, 1981, p. 223)

The perception of IVCOs by NGOs has often been that they have an old fashioned paternalistic modus operandi, though there are some signs that this perception is changing as I have mentioned. This is demonstrated for example in the ACFOA submission to the Australian volunteer review (Australian Council for Overseas Aid,
and the increasing number of volunteers being used by NGOs in their development work. I argue here that many IVCOs have deliberately chosen to work through volunteers because of the distinct nature of the relational approach this provides for development with emphasis on people and relationships. Volunteers that are locally managed and accountable in the South allow partnerships based on solidarity and technical skills. While this relational approach through volunteers has a real and present danger of paternalism, with strong local ownership and management, it can encourage real practical development outcomes and local accountability while challenging entrenched stereotypes and structural barriers in the North.

I conclude that IVCOs should be considered development NGOs. All development NGOs are open to claims of paternalism, charity and lack of downward accountability depending on how they operate and particularly whether they respond beyond immediate expressed needs and the ‘resource transfer’ mode to broader longer term structural causes of poverty and injustice. Part of that operating process for IVCOs is using volunteers within local organisations as well as creating linkages for education and structural change between North and South. A comparison with how other NNGOs operate demonstrates the importance of downward accountability over simple criticisms of using outsiders in the South. IVCOs demonstrate downward accountability by ensuring volunteers are requested and managed largely by local organisations and increasingly use exchange and networking South South, North South and South North for these locally defined ends.

**Volunteering for development**

As mentioned in Chapter One, a fundamental issue for IVCOs is the question of whether volunteers are purely an instrumental tool for development or whether there is logic and meaning for volunteering in a development context as a means and an end.
This query is also a particular form of a more general question that this thesis poses: Is volunteering purely technical assistance and paternalistic or can it enhance the nature and substance of development understanding and by extension development outcomes? As Chambers (1983) says, “A stronger person wants to change things for a person who is weaker. From this paternal trap there is no complete escape” (p. 141). Does volunteering feed paternalistic stereotypical perceptions of north and south as strong and weak? Certainly historically this stereotype might be seen as reflecting at least the initial focus of some IVCOs, but not necessarily others, but the evolution of most agencies has brought deeper development understanding and altered priorities as a result. Perceptions of volunteer status may make much more ambiguous who is the ‘stronger’ and ‘weaker’ one anyway. Discussion of Pinkau’s (1977) research conclusions and specific IVCOs and their characteristics compared to other development NGOs, provide responses to these questions in this chapter. I will continue this exploration by looking at volunteering as a development player and shaper. Then I will consider questions of volunteering and paternalism or neo colonialism.

**Volunteering as a development player and shaper**

A 1967 Overseas Development Institute study on Volunteers in Development concluded:

> Volunteers can be a useful form of technical assistance for development. They can fill genuine and important needs in developing countries; they can provide a valuable and relatively inexpensive addition to other technical assistance programs. They have in addition, a helpful effect on domestic public opinion about developing countries and they are likely to promote international understanding. (Moyes, 1967, p. 7)

In other words, international volunteers are of technical and relational value. However, this view has not been a mainstream view across the development sector historically where international volunteering has been rather misunderstood or unrecognised if not invisible. This appears in the new millennium to be changing.
Kermal Dervis, the UNDP Administrator suggested in 2006:

As demonstrated around the world, volunteers have a unique and important role to play as active participants in the development process. Indeed, volunteers, volunteer involving organizations, as well as volunteer networks are important resources that need to be properly recognized as legitimate development partners. For UNDP, harnessing the energies and creativity of millions of people worldwide who want to make a distinctive contribution through volunteerism to development and peace will be critical in the years ahead as we approach the 2015 deadline for achieving the MDGs. (United Nations Volunteers, 2006d)

Indeed the scale of international volunteering for development provides an insight into its potential importance though it has rarely been calculated. Such figures are also complicated by differing definitions and durations but United Nations Volunteers estimated that volunteer development workers “add up to about one-fifth of all skilled international personnel serving in developing countries, but account for a higher (and growing) proportion of the long-term (ie more than one year) resident group among such personnel” at the start of the 1990s (Dey, 1991, p. 13).

This call for recognition was an important hint at the traditional exclusion by development organisations of volunteers, volunteer agencies and networks as ‘real’ international development contributors. With growing recognition of volunteer work in development and currently increasing international aid budgets, it is an important time to reflect on the role of international volunteering for development so as to improve it, refine it and consolidate its unique aspects so that it can be a positive contributor towards reconceptualising development. Kemal Dervis specifically acknowledged this when he said “UNV is helping to redefine development” (United Nations Volunteers, 2006d, p. 2). He said UN Volunteers is “making volunteerism in its various forms—mutual aid and self-help, philanthropy and service, advocacy and campaigning—an effective driver of development” (United Nations Volunteers, 2006d, p. 2).
What Kemal Dervis indicates is that there is a valid contribution for IVCOs to make to development in a practical but also philosophical sense by expanding conceptions about the nature of development. While volunteers demonstrate the practical and human or relational side of development, they also demonstrate that volunteers experience firsthand development dilemmas and respond to them within a volunteer framework of solidarity, experiential learning, skills exchange and social justice.

Other indicators of the growing recognition of IVCOs and their volunteers for development are found in several places. In 2005 CIDA released a review of the Canadian Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP) which encompassed the work of 10 NGO volunteer cooperation agencies with support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The report concluded that the “VCP is achieving significant development results in developing countries”…and “is having a significant, if uneven, impact on Canadians’ understanding of different cultures as well as their knowledge of development issues and support for international development programs” (CIDA, 2005, p. i). It also acknowledged positive change:

some fundamental shifts in the management, governance and strategic directions of VCAs in the past five to ten years are bringing new energy, experience, and ways of working in the sector, and are increasing the respect for VCAs. (p. 34)

Separately the 2005 OECD Development Cooperation report says the OECD now realises the importance of disaggregating the information about technical cooperation and indicates that new OECD statistics are being compiled to reflect key components of technical cooperation including volunteers (OECD, 2006a). In addition the recently
completed AusAID review of the Australian Government supported international volunteer programs demonstrates strong ownership for the broad results. It concluded:

There is strong evidence that Australian volunteer placements...have had a positive impact on host organisations (HOs) and volunteers, in terms of mutual capacity development, cultural exchange and enhancement of personal and professional linkages.

Success is vested not just in the volunteer or the assignment, but the whole process; relationships between partners and the volunteer cycle. This approach is most effective where there is long term planning and investment in partner relationships beyond the annual funding cycle, and a program approach to facilitate this process. …

At the VSP [Volunteer Service Program] and volunteer assignment level, mutual capacity development, and fostering linkages and partnerships have been found to create the greatest positive impact, with a potential for sustainability if supported by long term investment in stakeholder relationships. Assessing AGVP impact on public awareness is more difficult to determine at the broader level of the Australian community, but certainly there is a positive impact on return of the volunteer, at the local family and community level. (Kwitko & McDonald, 2009, p. viii)

International volunteers clearly are gaining growing acceptance from official development channels which has important ramifications. Allum (2007) identifies the benefits to UK founded IVCOs in DFID allowing volunteer recruitment beyond the UK for example recruiting Nigerian doctors to work in Mozambique. Thinking of development considerations discussed earlier related to paternalism and avoiding creating dependence, Pinkau (1981) identified “particular interest in the condition under which the presence of the foreigner or outside funding would not interfere with the internal mobilization of citizens in aid receiving nations” (p. 220). She identified three levels of cooperation ranging from none, through foreign assistance to partnership cooperation. ‘Foreign assistance’ she said was:

Marked by differences between the “giver” (foreign VDS or foreign aid agencies) and the “receiver” (the domestic VDS or the project community) and includes various elements: the control of the assets of the aid in

32 The positive ownership is reflected in their description of the diverse international volunteer programs under one banner as the Australian Government Volunteer Program (AGVP). It reflects the substantial government funding but not the separate community and corporate support and in kind contribution of volunteers.
question; extent of decision making power and the consequent influence on
decision outcomes and dependency on outside conditions; personal wealth
and monthly income of participants; living standards and social status of
participants; and access to project management and supervisors by lower
level personnel or participants. (p. 220)

In keeping with much of the Paris Declaration Principles discussed in Chapter Three,
Pinkau (1981) found the ‘foreign assistance’ approach no longer appropriate and noted
the incompatibility between development participation and ongoing control of the aid
by the “giver” and potentially a few local elites. She concluded, “only if these
differences are removed can an outsider become a creative mobilizer” (p. 221). Pinkau’s
study established that for a volunteer development service to be optimally effective
‘there must be a clear need determination based around the causes for which it was
established, including target groups, coverage and required service volume’ (p. 221).

According to Pinkau (1981), ‘partnership-cooperation’ was an alternative to the ‘foreign
assistance’ mode through volunteer development services. These demonstrate the
synergies of working under similar conditions for mutual benefit because of the creative
diversity of cultural difference. She said development volunteering facilitated:

An equal-term relationship when cultural difference turns into a creative
growth relationship because the prejudices regarding one another’s
differences have been removed. Reduction of prejudice requires shared
coping, equal status participation and common value resources….Translated
into the relationships among VDS, partnership-cooperation is then seen as
joint work/service in development projects; equality of terms, social status,
and reciprocity of service conditions; and building on the basis of common
causes. It is under such conditions that joint work between domestic and
foreign volunteers enables mutual learning and growth more so than within
a national group of volunteers. (p. 222)

The negative side of IVCO recognition as development players is the corollary demand
that they demonstrate practical and often short term development ‘outcomes’. As a
result this new recognition can entail a healthy but challenging shift for IVCOs. In the
past they were accountable to funders and supporters on the basis of volunteer numbers
and individual volunteer partner achievements rather than by the actual quality or
broader program reach/implication of their specific development interventions. As a result a broader, more thematic/programmatic approach has gradually been adopted by most IVCOs. The difficulty can come when the quality of an intervention is measured more by short to medium term tangible practical outcomes than longer term processes, relationships and networking. These relational aspects are what IVCOs have generally considered fundamental to their approach but they are much more difficult to measure in terms of cause and effect from a specific element. The attribution of a specific outcome to an outside intervention is also potentially at odds with the approach of cultivating local ownership so that at the end of a collaborative endeavour the contribution of outsiders is invisible and the achievements of local people and institutions is most evident (Ellerman, 2004; Merkle, 2008; Smutyo, 2001). This recognition embodies Ellerman’s (2004) indirect approach for achieving “Autonomy Respecting Assistance” but highlights the difficulty of attribution with this approach.

As Pinkau (1981) analysed, the IVCOs have frequently used a community development model of having a volunteer within a local organisation but not with power over what that organisation does. This potentially provides good levels of local ownership and accountability (fundamental for capacity development) because the volunteer is locally managed so his or her outputs are more oriented toward local priorities than external ones. This also means the volunteers are at the mercy of local resource, management and other constraints over which he or she has very little, if any, control. For example a review of the AYAD program (C. Bennett & Morrow, 2006) called for ‘realistic’ expectations stating: “there are many factors beyond the control of the AYAD that affect the degree to which capacity development objectives can be progressed…AYADs do not generally have authority over critical resources or decisions” (p. 18). While volunteers may provide gradual and long term successful capacity development (and
personal development for the volunteer), they may not be able to guarantee externally prioritised programmatic development outcomes\(^{33}\) desired by IVCOs and required by their funders. So while the emphasis on outcomes and a programmatic approach may increase the likelihood of some measurable gains, it must be balanced against cultivating local organisation ownership and capacity development from the process.

**Paternalism, relational development and cross cultural learning**

Despite the regular critiques of over the last 15 years discussed in Chapter 3, queries about international volunteering for development have rarely been articulated in any detail. Given international volunteering’s obvious overlap with some aspects of technical assistance, the latter’s critiques remain inevitably a subtle counter to tacit assumptions about the positive nature of international volunteering.

The lack of almost any other discussion about the pros and cons of long term international volunteers in academic or other development writings is unfortunate as such analysis would provide an opportunity for the ambiguities of benefits and shortcomings to be systematically examined. Indeed even the IVCO sector has in the past missed opportunities for public reflection/research or transparent self-criticism though this is now changing. This public silence may have been due to the obvious fear that admitting any shortcomings in concrete overseas impact could jeopardise fragile ongoing funding commitments, largely from government aid agencies. From many accounts this ‘self censorship’ may have been singularly counterproductive in the longer term. For example the 2003 Danish IVCO MS review stated: “as long as MS is supported by public funds, the utility, effectiveness and efficiency of the personnel-

\(^{33}\) In donor circles there is an increasing focus on sectoral or programmatic development work as a way of trying to avoid the problem of aid creating ‘islands of development in a sea of poverty’ through sector wide approaches (SWAPS) that aim for individual gains and far reaching strategic ones. The dilemma with such an approach can be that in achieving sector or program wide objectives the quality and substance of change is relatively low despite being far reaching. Moreover such work is less likely to involve the grassroots and more likely to involve high level activity at policy and government level.
based model applied by MS must be supported by evidence that is independent of MS’ own ideology” (Chr Michelsen Institute, 2004).

A 2002 Global Service Institute working paper (Brav, Moore, & Sherraden, 2002) provided a rare and independent critique of local and international volunteer service and ways to address and research these. They discussed the limitations of civic service and focused on the central theme of control of others ranging from paternalism to exploitation. The area where there has been significant growth in discussion and academic critique over the last five years is in the area of volunteer tourism with Simpson, others and even VSO criticising commercial gap year volunteer sending agencies (Simpson, 2004).

Virtually the only detailed and specific public ‘opportunities’ for reflection in busy, under-resourced IVCOs have been the mandatory funder reviews that were reluctantly accepted rather than embraced as learning opportunities, given the perceived drastic ramifications of a negative report. Some programs like the KEPA Finnish long term volunteer program and the Irish volunteer sending agency APSO disappeared as a result of government withdrawal of support. However while a defensive IVCO response is understandable in this climate, constructive reflection and change is also possible.

In 2003 The UK’s VSO and the Danish volunteer agency MS, were externally reviewed. The 2003 VSO review was singularly positive and affirmed VSO’s role and strategy for development using international volunteers. The review’s only slight criticism was a call for greater systematic evaluation of VSO’s outcomes (Munro, Muir, & Watkins, 2003). Perhaps partly as a result of this assessment, VSO consolidated its existing approach with great confidence and increasing scale and internationalisation.
At the same time it put more energy and resources into review of its work using “Most Significant Change” and other methodologies and opened itself to other possibilities including shorter term volunteering for development (consolidated through a merger with British Executive Service Overseas (BESO) in 2005) and increasing encouragement and recruitment of volunteers from the South.

The 2003 Danish MS review conclusions were mixed with many positives along with a query about why intercultural cooperation should be an MS goal and whether, more fundamentally, volunteer ‘development workers’ should remain the central axis of its work. In 2005 MS reformed but reaffirmed the central development workers’ role, but in its Partnership against Poverty strategy subsumed intercultural cooperation as a means to its now sole goal of poverty alleviation, rather than a joint aim (MS, 2005; MS Actionaid Denmark, 2009). After another study in 2008 (Victor Hansen, et al.), MS is now implementing a new program called People for Change with a strong focus “on South South exchange and greater synergy between professionals and volunteers”, with partner organisations defining more closely the needs of advisors and volunteers to avoid the program being supply driven (MS Actionaid, 2009, p. 17). The new strategy emphasises the distinctions between 3 different roles (MS Actionaid Denmark, 2009). The first is the ‘global citizen volunteer’ of largely Danes with particular emphasis on solidarity global citizenship and cross cultural exchange. The second category is the ‘inspirator/facilitator’ of largely people from the South with a focus on exchange of regional experience, skills and capacity. The third category is the advisor of experienced international professionals to ensure delivery of program objectives and outputs.

The MS transition from the time of the 2003 review and even in 2001 when its government support was reduced, to its current approach is instructive. It demonstrates
that an IVCO can adapt and respond to critical review and a changing context and level of government support in innovative ways. MS adapted to government demands while staying true to its values and base. It retained its “political approach to development” for a “democratic people centred globalisation and cooperation across national and cultural borders” where “people to people cooperation is both a means and an end (MS Actionaid Denmark, 2009, p. 7). It has also committed itself to “test and prove relevant People 4 Change approaches” and mainstream them in Actionaid (its new national and international affiliation) while reaffirming that “the intercultural dimensions: the learning, solidarity and understanding” are still important even if historically they have taken different forms (MS Actionaid Denmark, 2009, pp. 10,17).

In summary while there have been some significant criticisms of international volunteers for development, there is also a tentative, small but growing acceptance of their relevance from governments and NGOs despite different historical critiques.

Herb Feith was a pioneer volunteer in the organised long term international volunteer movement and he shows that his intentions, concerns and solidarity are far from unfettered and unquestioning of paternalism, neo-colonialism or imperialism. David Wainwright in his 1965 book about VSO quotes Australian Feith who went to Indonesia in 1951 as the inaugural participant in Melbourne Universities Volunteer Graduate Scheme. Herb travelled by boat to Jakarta in 1951 to take up a post on local pay and conditions as translator with the Ministry of Information (Overseas Service Bureau, 1995). Herb reflects this in the following letter home where he is confronted deeply by an everyday human encounter:

It is hard to take the impact of the terrible misery so constant that it is accepted with resignation. I feel in myself strange beatings of shame, of resentment and frustration…How much should I give to the beggars? I don’t know. Complicated questions are linked to this. How far should I act
on impulse? How far should I plan my giving? Should I only give where I can advise or take them to a clinic? Or should I give, not to beggars, but to others who seem to be in dire need but do not ask? Am I to consider the moral evils of charitable giving? Am I, by giving, undermining the government’s attempts to help the destitute by other means? Believe me, these questions are a lot less academic than they might seem. (Wainwright, 1965, p. 74)

Herb’s deep questions emerge from an international volunteer living and working alongside local people under local conditions. He gained his insights by the human interaction of a relational view of development.

It has been said that the roots of international volunteer work are in charitable work overseas but with the advent of organisations like VSO in 1958, these gained additional objectives of “aid for development, public relations between countries and a form of education for the volunteers themselves” (Moyes, 1967, p. 9). Moyes (1967) suggested that from his research: “officials in several governments—those of Eastern Nigeria, Thailand, India for example—think that this public relations aspect could be one of the most important benefits of volunteer programs” (p. 18). Moyes concludes that their contribution to development is the central element for volunteers and funders of most ‘major volunteer programs’ (p. 18). However, he thinks that these programs should combine practical development initiatives with cultivating broader international understanding.

On the basis of her research findings, Pinkau (1981) described the features of an effective Foreign VDS. Weyers (1981) noted Pinkau’s recommendations and added to them:

such services should be rendered by foreigners and nationals on equal conditions…;

such services should be rendered not primarily to projects selected by foreigners but to local and national self-help organizations, thereby strengthening their programmes and structures;
such services should concentrate on establishing teamwork between foreigners and locals instead of on individual foreigner-counterpart relationships;

services provided by foreigners should in all cases become integrated into organizations of the aid-receiving country; they should be under local leadership without interference from an independent field staff. (p. 237)

Pinkau and Weyers highlight the important practice of international volunteers being on equal conditions; responding to locally identified needs via local and national institutions and structures; encouraging team work not limiting reporting and collaboration to between individuals; and the importance of volunteers being integrated into local organisations and being most directly accountable to them.

Who are the independent IVCOs?

Independent International Volunteer Sending Agencies have a long history. Independent international volunteer work (separate to missionary endeavours operating prior to that) started with short term work-camps for post World War One re-construction in Europe in the 1920s, and relief and emergency assistance in India and other developing countries in the 1930s and 1940s. In Australia, 1951 saw the inauguration of the Graduate Volunteer Program in Melbourne. This program was probably the first formal opportunity worldwide for long term international volunteering for development, though many other similar volunteer sending organisations were formed soon after. It was inspired by an Indonesian delegate at the World University Service Assembly who spoke of “the value that could occur if technical experts working in under-developed lands were able to enter into the whole life of that society, rather than merely contributing their knowledge” (Australian Volunteers International, 2001, p. 2).

Meanwhile Voluntary Service Overseas was founded in 1958 in the UK. The NGO Overseas Service Bureau was formed in 1961 to take over management of the Australian Graduate Volunteer Program and this was transformed soon after into the Australian Volunteers Abroad (AVA) program. The AVA program was founded on the
idea of working for development by facilitating the sharing of technical skills at the same time as promoting cross cultural exchange with developing countries (Overseas Service Bureau, 1995).

I will now outline some more detailed examples of volunteer sending agencies and their historical evolution, development vision and aims starting with the most international of the independent international volunteer sending agencies in UN Volunteers and then discussing also Australian Volunteers International, Voluntary Service Overseas, Skillshare International, and Progressio. The Finnish Service Centre for Development Cooperation (KEPA) and Austraining are organisations not solely focused on volunteers that provide contrasting but interesting examples given the demise of NGO umbrella KEPA’s long term Finnish Volunteer Service (FVS) after a critical evaluation and the experience of an Australian company managing the Volunteering for International Development from Australia (VIDA) and Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) programs. All of these organisations are discussed because:

1. they provide concrete examples of how international volunteer cooperation organisations operate and with what philosophical development understanding and connection to civil society. In this sense they provide strong complementary insights to other more theoretical literature that has been reviewed and give direct reference to international volunteering for development which is often lacking from literature on volunteering. And

2. with the exception of Finnish KEPA, the work of the agencies and their volunteers are included in the current research endeavour (through document revision, surveying or interviewing of their volunteers/partner organisations) and so their work will be reflected in practice in later chapters. With the exception of KEPA and Austraining they
also provide a good snapshot of the independent volunteer cooperating organisations mentioned earlier as members of Forum.

Pinkau (1981) says that the Volunteer Development Services she studied demonstrated great diversity but also significant similarities and suggested: “in these common features they form a volunteer service culture in communities around the world that can be mobilized to help solve the problems of humankind on this ever smaller and limited globe” (p. 223). UNV is a particularly interesting case to begin with because of the broad and global character of its mandate, as set up by global democratic agreement in the United Nations General Assembly.

**UN Volunteers**

UN Volunteers was formally established by resolution 2659 (XXV) of the UN General Assembly on December 7 1970. This was done after almost ten years of discussion at the UN. Attempts to “internationalize the Peace Corps” had been proposed by the United States of America in April 1961 but this proposal found opposition from the Soviet Union which was already apprehensive about US Peace Corps volunteers working in the South partly as a strategy in the cold war (Pastor, 1974, p. 376). These concerns were overcome by the strong lobbying of Iran as a non aligned country in the UN as well as opportune timing given international student unrest in the late 1960s and an interest in channelling this constructively. Also important was the greater South representation in the UN and corresponding pressure for a bigger and better UN development program for the Second Development Decade (Pastor, 1974, p. 378).

The creation of UN Volunteers was based on a report prepared for the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (1969a) on “The Feasibility of Creating an International Corps of Volunteers for Development”. ECOSOC, in setting the criteria
for such a Corps, had defined volunteers as “persons offering their services without regard to financial benefit and with the purpose of contributing to the development of a recipient country” (p. 96).

Resolution 2659 of the General Assembly said that, in the light of the ECOSOC volunteer feasibility report, it was convinced of the importance of young people’s contribution toward a better society and that ‘voluntary service in development’ was a ‘rewarding form’ of participation that could be successful as ‘an additional source of trained manpower’ providing:

a. the service was well organised and used volunteers recruited and serving on as broad a geographic basis as was feasible ‘including in particular the developing countries’ and with the necessary resources provided

b. volunteers had the ‘technical and personal qualifications’ needed ‘for the development of recipient countries’… ‘including the transfer of skills’ and that
c. “volunteers are not sent to a country without the explicit request and approval of the recipient Governments concerned” (United Nations General Assembly, 1970, p. 53).

UN Volunteers was created under the administration of the UNDP and its new coordinator was to:

promote and co-ordinate the recruitment, selection, training and administrative management of the activities of the United Nations Volunteers within the United Nations system in collaboration with the United Nations agencies concerned and in co-operation with organizations dealing with national and international voluntary service and, where appropriate, with relevant youth organizations. (United Nations General Assembly, 1970, p. 53)

The issue of being inclusive, touched on earlier, was uppermost in UN members’ minds and so a ‘Special Voluntary Fund’ was also established so that “no financial obstacles
should hinder the participation of volunteers from developing countries in the work of other developing countries” (United Nations Development Programme, 1970, p. 55).

From the summary of discussion from the 1970 UNDP governing council about the creation of UNV, it is clear that ‘there was broad agreement’ that appropriately qualified volunteers ‘could make a contribution to development’. The clear assessment that the volunteer would make a real difference for development is worth highlighting but also stressed was the importance of domestic volunteers being included in an international volunteer corps. It was further suggested that this international volunteering would “serve the ideals of international co-operation” and this was further affirmed by several members at the 1971 UNDP governing council (United Nations Development Programme, 1970, p. 54, 1971, p. 39). So even at the level of the United Nations, the idea of combining volunteering for development and international understanding has been directly affirmed.

UNV’s former executive coordinator Sharon Capeling Alakija (2001) said that UNV was distinctive because of its multiethnic, multinational composition and had become a “people’s portal to the United Nations” by providing an “entry point for ordinary people from around the world to relate to the United Nations and the work that it does” (p. 4). In 2005 UNV mobilised 8400 volunteers from 168 countries working in 144 countries very much in keeping with its original mission to have volunteers recruited and serving across a wide geographic area (United Nations Volunteers, 2006c). Another example of the level of inclusiveness of the program was the gradual increase in gender balance of volunteers between 1992 and 2002 from 22 to 37 % females (Duque Gonzalez, 2003, p. 4). In addition, true to the UN members wish for including domestic volunteers, in 2006 67 % of the UNVs were international UNVs, 33% were national UNVs and beyond that UNV has promoted a volunteer enabling environment through

Most UNV assignments are from one to two years in duration though there are some opportunities that are less than twelve months. UNV as part of its work on creating an enabling environment for volunteering has been innovative with programs such as online volunteering and the TOKTEN program. TOKTEN stands for the Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals where expatriates from the South (now living abroad) are recruited as volunteers to return to their home country for two to twelve weeks to provide skills and services for local development. For example in March 2006 UNV reported that 29 TOKTEN assignments had been successfully completed with various government departments in Afghanistan (United Nations Volunteers, 2006b).

While UNV’s ‘original mandate’ for development cooperation remains at the core of UNV’s work, this is complemented by work in “humanitarian and emergency relief, peace building and electoral support activities” (Duque Gonzalez, 2003, p. 2). UNV was evaluated in 2003 “with a view to recommending improvements that could ensure the most efficient use of resources” (Duque Gonzalez, 2003, p. 1). The evaluation quoted the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as saying: “deployment of international UNVs proved successful and became mainstreamed, appreciation of their professional performance grew apace, as well as UNHCR’s reliance on them to a level beyond what could normally be expected of ‘volunteers’” (p. 6). It noted “varying perceptions and conflicting views with regard to the concept and cost of volunteers” with some suggesting the conditions international UNVs were under meant UNVs from the South may in fact be motivated by financial gain because of the comparatively low remuneration available in their home country (p. 5). Meanwhile a
report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations complained of the problem for morale of UNVs who “work alongside colleagues who are making three or four times their salary for similar functions” (p. 6). Clearly for UNV, finding a middle appropriate ground here has required compromise at both ends of this spectrum.

As with all the IVCOs, volunteer work related directly to the environment has been a constant but small proportion of UNV’s work. In December 2001 UNV conducted an internal “Review of UNVs involvement in Environment” which concluded that in the decade following the 1992 Rio summit approximately 3% of UNVs had been involved in some way with environmental activities and 7% of its Special Voluntary Fund projects were focused on environment (Martius & Klinnert, 2001, p. 1). In 2006 UNV’s annual report attributed 5% of UNV Program Activities to Energy and Environment for sustainable development (United Nations Volunteers, 2006d, p. 28).

UNV’s mission statement is as follows:

Volunteering brings benefits to both society at large and the individual volunteer. It makes important contributions, economically as well as socially. It contributes to a more cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity among citizens. The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme is the UN organization that supports sustainable human development globally through the promotion of volunteerism, including the mobilization of volunteers. It serves the causes of peace and development by enhancing opportunities for participation by all peoples. It is universal, inclusive and embraces volunteer action in all its diversity. It values free will, commitment, engagement and solidarity, which are the foundations of volunteerism. (United Nations Volunteers, 2009, p. 31)

UNV is administered by UNDP and hence accountable to the UNDP executive board which is made up of representatives of 36 countries who serve on a rotating basis. In 2010 this board has regional groups made up of 8 African states, 7 Asian states, 5 Latin America and Caribbean states, and 4 Eastern European states and 12 Western European
and Other States including the UK and USA, Canada, Sweden, Finland and Japan (United Nations Development Programme, 2010b).

UN Volunteers continues a long standing role of bringing government and IVCOs together to work on development policy and volunteering issues. It does this through intergovernmental meetings and ‘practice notes’ as well as UN level advocacy at summits like the 2002 summit on sustainable development in South Africa or innovative promotion for example with information and communication technologies for development using volunteers through UNITES or the TOKTEN scheme to use expatriate nationals as volunteers in their own countries.

**Australian Volunteers International**

As probably the first formal IVCO (Morris, 1973, p. 5), the Australian Volunteer Graduate Scheme (VGS) became the Overseas Service Bureau and then Australian Volunteers International (Australian Volunteers International, 2000, p. ii). The VGS approach set the spirit for OSB, AVI and other independent IVCOs. As Robert Morris suggests, the VGS to Indonesia was based on a philosophy distinct from many subsequent programs because ‘helping’ did not feature strongly in the program’s justification even if in practice positive achievements were made. Morris (1973) quotes from one seasoned worker in the volunteer movement who described the program as ‘realistic’:

> a chance …to go there and work as ‘pegawais’ (government servants) on a pegawai wage, which means queuing for your rice and finding a second or third job to cover the three-fourths of your cost of living that exceeds your salary. The aim was for them to really find out what life was like in Indonesia. If they made a small contribution to development in the process, then that was a bonus (p. 13)

However, not to discount an indirect and significant contribution, he says “From all indications, the contributions were often quite substantial” (p. 13).
Looking back in retrospect this way of operating may have provided a clever but subtle way of discouraging the strong and weak stereotypes of ‘helper’ and ‘helped’ while still allowing positive change to quietly emerge.

AVI (2008) now says its vision is for:

a peaceful and just world; a sustainable world, where all people have access to the resources they need, the opportunity to achieve their potential, the right to make decisions about the kind of development they want and to participate in the future of their own communities. (p. 3)

The AVI website explains how AVI works:

International volunteering based on reciprocal learning through commitment, engagement and solidarity contributes to such a world. International volunteers share their knowledge, experiences and skills as they live, work and learn in response to needs expressed by local communities. Australian Volunteers International provides opportunities for Australians to become volunteers and assists them in sharing the learnings from their international experiences. (Australian Volunteers International, 2005)

AVI says its values as an organisation are guided by: “principles of equity, respect, integrity, cultural diversity and partnership” (Australian Volunteers International, 2005). It “provides much needed technical support through the assignment of volunteers in direct response to locally identified needs” and is “committed to long term development outcomes through sustainable partnerships with host country employers” (Australian Volunteers International, 2006a, p. 7). However AVI’s work does not stop at the technical as it is aimed at “creating a peaceful and just world” (Australian Volunteers International, 2008, p. 3).

Since the commencement of the Volunteer Graduate Scheme more than 6000 Australian Volunteers have worked in 70 countries in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America (Australian Volunteers International, 2002). In 2002 AVI reported
having 59% women volunteers on assignment, continuing a historic trend for a majority of females in the program while the average volunteer age was 37 (p. 14).

AVI is also networked with Australian and international volunteer sending agencies that ‘bring communities and people together in Australia and overseas’ through FORUM and other associations. It is also a founding member of the Australian Council for International Development – ACFID (founded in 1965 as ACFOA) which is an independent national umbrella organisation of Australian NGOs working in international aid and development.

AVI receives significant funding from the Australian Government aid program through AusAID but complements this with fundraising, corporate sponsorships and donations (Australian Volunteers International, 2006a). In 2001 AVI estimated it received in kind volunteer and other community contributions worth more than twice the amount obtained from the government (Australian Volunteers International, 2001, p. 34).

AVI complements its core business of ‘volunteer sending’ with a recruitment service for Australian Indigenous communities, cross-cultural briefings for employers deploying staff overseas, and managing the Pacific Technical Assistance Mechanism for AusAID (Australian Volunteers International, 2006c). AVI, like other IVCOs such as VSO, Skillshare International and Progressio, is a member of the coalition of aid and community groups that form the global Make Poverty History Campaign.

Reliance on the local South organisation for volunteer direction, guidance and support was particularly noticeable for volunteers through Australian Volunteers International until 2004 (when government policy forced a change) because AVI deliberately avoided
having local support offices to encourage greater mutual reliance and autonomy for the
host organisation to decide how best to use the volunteer. This probably had the
disadvantages of less on the ground support for AVI volunteers and less strategic
development of individual placements into a broader sectoral or programmatic focus
which is now favoured by donors. On the positive side however it probably led to to
stronger relationships with and support from local host/partner organisations and greater
agenda setting by them and this was highlighted earlier by Weyers and Pinkau (Weyers,
1981). This local agenda setting may be harder now where IVCOs have to find partners
to fit their programmatic focus or strategic goals and have less flexibility to accept
important requests that do not fit these.

AVI has a council of ‘eminent citizens and supporters’ ‘designed to reflect the diversity
of the Australian nation’ that selects an honorary board of directors to oversee the
organisation’s work (Australian Volunteers International, 2006b).

**Voluntary Service Overseas**

VSO describes itself as:

> an international development charity that works through volunteers. Instead
> of sending food or money, we send women and men from a wide range of
> professions who want the chance to make a real difference in the fight
> against poverty. These volunteers work in partnership with colleagues and
> communities to share skills and learning and achieve positive change
> together. (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006f)

VSO says its purpose is:

> To promote volunteering to fight poverty and disadvantage. (Voluntary
> Service Overseas, 2008, p. 5)

VSO recruits volunteers worldwide through affiliates in Canada, India, Kenya, Uganda,
the Netherlands, the Philippines, Ireland and Australia/New Zealand (Voluntary Service
Overseas, 2009). It recognises that its volunteering approach has changed significantly
since it began sending school leavers overseas in 1958 with support from Interchurch
Aid. Now its “volunteers are skilled professionals mainly in their thirties or forties, and most placements last for two years’ (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006f). It was also one of the first IVCOs to invest in research and evaluation that enabled it to develop one of the IVCOs most coherent and well argued rationales of volunteering for development that is still on its website.

Since 1958, VSO has sent out over 30,000 volunteers “to work in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, the Pacific and, more latterly, Eastern Europe in response to requests from governments and community organizations” (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006f). In 2006 there were approximately 1,500 people working in these regions as volunteers (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006f).

VSO’s recognition within the development sector was acknowledged when they were voted top international development charity in the International Aid and Development category at the UK Charity Awards in 2004 (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006f). The UK ‘charity sector’ may translate for many other countries as the philanthropic sector, which does not have the same connotation as ‘charity’ for most people. A 2003 UK Department for International Development (DFID) review of VSO commended VSO’s work and the value adding it provided by combining volunteers and development:

volunteers are central to the work of VSO and play a key role in development….The fact that VSO is not a funding organisation, but an organisation that recruits volunteers in response to partner’s requests,… means there are qualitative differences in the process of partnership development and the nature of its partnerships. (Munro, et al., 2003, pp. V,7)

VSO’s website explains the practical basis and requirements for international volunteers:

We respond to requests from governments and community organizations throughout Asia and Africa…. Volunteers can be aged between 20 and 75 years old and must have a formal qualification and some work experience.
Regular postings are for two years and volunteers are provided with accommodation and a local level allowance as well as air fares and insurance. (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006a)

As a result of the production of VSO’s strategic plan in 2004 a programmatic approach has since aimed “to achieve change for disadvantaged people in six 'goal' areas – education, HIV & AIDS, disability, secure livelihoods, participation and governance and health and social well-being” (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006d). An example of VSO’s approach to its goal areas is its work in secure livelihoods which includes an environment/sustainability focus as described below:

VSO aims to strengthen the ability of disadvantaged people to make a viable living. A secure livelihood depends on a combination of factors such as personal skills and knowledge, physical assets and social networks as well as on functioning government institutions, policies and laws. VSO will seek to understand the strategies which disadvantaged people in rural and urban communities use to survive, and to empower them in securing their livelihoods. This will include influencing the policies and structures that prevent disadvantaged people from securing a living. (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006c)

The secure livelihoods program emphasises capacity building, enterprise development and resource conservation and had 19% of VSOs overall volunteers in 2005 (Volunteer Service Overseas, 2005, p. 1).

VSO also emphasises raising awareness and says that:

Through our volunteers and supporters VSO makes a uniquely powerful contribution to building a sense of community where people of all cultures are seen as equal, learn from each other and share a common sense of rights and responsibilities as global citizens. We do this through our 'Global Education' work – raising awareness and understanding of disadvantage, challenging misconceptions about a country, culture or religion, promoting understanding of the links between the decisions made by governments, corporations and consumers and the lives of others around the world, and encouraging people to take action in some way, however 'small' (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006e).

VSO has an international board which: “reflects the international structure of VSO, with the inclusion of representatives from VSO federation members in Canada (CUSO-
VSO), Kenya (VSO Jitolee), the Netherlands (VSO Netherlands), the Philippines (VSO Bahaginan) and the UK (VSO UK)” (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2010).

In 2002 VSO announced that it had trebled the number of female volunteers over the previous 20 years and that for the first time female volunteers now outnumbered males. It noted that this contrasted sharply with the fact that only 15% of international executives are women (Voluntary Service Overseas, 2006g).

In summary VSO is a good example of an IVCO with initial support largely from a church aid group that soon evolved into a broad community based but government supported operation. It recruits skilled professionals (from North and South) for long term development work under local conditions and combines this with advocacy work in the North.

**Skillshare International**

Making clear what he sees as Skillshare International’s central emphasis on volunteering for development, Cliff Allum, its CEO, says in the 2007-8 Annual Review: “Our international volunteering programme continued to be central in taking forward our development goals in partnership with local organisations” (Skillshare International, 2008b, p. 2). He clearly situates Skillshare International as a development organisation using international volunteering as a key medium or tool.

Skillshare International’s Annual Financial Statements (2008a) draw on its official vision and purpose to explain its focus on volunteering for development to combat poverty, injustice and inequality through international collaboration that can bring mutual benefit and peace:
Skillshare International is an international volunteering and development organisation working to reduce poverty, injustice and inequality. Our vision is of a world where people, regardless of cultural, social and political divides, come together for mutual benefit, living in peaceful co-existence. (p. 1)

In 2007-8 they “worked in partnership with 137 organisations in the social economy sector (87%) and public sector (13%) in Southern Africa, East Africa and Asia to build their capacity”. This was achieved through “sharing and developing skills and ideas, facilitating organisational and social change and building awareness of development issues”. They offer partners different interventions to build their capacity ranging from development worker placements to participation in leadership development programs as well as facilitating policy and advocacy support and opportunities for networking and ‘share learning’. Their partners “work directly with communities to reduce poverty, injustice and inequality, and to build awareness of international development issues” (Skillshare International, 2008a).

Skillshare International had 99 development workers supporting local partners in East Africa, Southern Africa and Asia in 2007-8. Giving a sense of accountabilities/independence, of 66 workers there at the end of the period, “44 were funded from unrestricted core funds and 22 were funded through projects”. In 2007-8, 85% of the volunteers were what they term “the traditional two-year model…while 10% were one-year placements”. In terms of the sectoral focus of the volunteer work 10% were working directly related to the environment which is of particular interest to this thesis, compared to 31% on health and 30% on economic empowerment (Skillshare International, 2008a, p. 3).
Skillshare International had emerged from IVS when it became clear that the needs and priorities of its “long term volunteer programme” were distinct from other parts of the IVS program. IVS had established an overseas long-term volunteer (LTV) program in the 1960s to “assist developing countries, primarily by providing skilled personnel to groups, communities and governments” in response to their expressed needs (Judge, 2004, p. 12).

By 1985, with pressure from the overseas volunteers for a more local approach to development, IVS resolved to separate the long-term program from its other activities. Skillshare Africa became an independent organisation in 1990. It held true to the values and ethos of IVS and continued the policy of localisation begun in 1986, when the first local staff were appointed to determine and manage the program. In 2000, when Skillshare Africa was joined by Action Health, the two organisations merged to form Skillshare International (Judge, 2004, p. 12).

The values and ethos that grounded IVS and Skillshare International were highlighted in the 1987 IVS Annual report by The Right Reverend Trevor Huddleston who was president of IVS from the 1970s until his death in 1998. It makes clear that integral to their values and ethos was supporting local people through initiatives that connected people not just funding.

Undoubtedly southern Africa is in crisis. But the crisis as it is so often presented to the affluent western world is seen generally as a combination of ‘natural disaster’ and local inadequacy. …What is so often completely overlooked in southern Africa today is the immense potential for development through the mobilisation of the skills and talents of the African people. It can only be possible to develop quickly and strongly enough to overcome the crisis if there are those who believe sufficiently strongly and whose concern is sufficiently deep to make international voluntary service a reality….Without the human initiatives which we know we can provide all the funding campaigns will fail. (Judge, 2004, p. 19)

34 IVS was the British Branch of Service Civil International set up by Pierre Ceresole after the First World War (Judge, 2004, p. 11)
For IVS and then Skillshare International, the role of a volunteer was:

To act as a catalyst for change and to contribute skills which were not available locally and were needed. The presence of an IVS volunteer was an expression of practical solidarity between people on the basis of equality and cooperation. Volunteers promoted international understanding by enabling people of different cultures to work alongside one another in partnership. (Judge, 2004, p. 12)

IVS and Skillshare did not however encourage practical interaction as a means to avoid or undermine the political implications of what was required for development as discussed earlier (Brav, et al., 2002). This was demonstrated by their direct engagement with the struggle for justice in Southern Africa. Cliff Allum and Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained the ordinary but crucial small local and global elements with big implications in a book compiling IVS/Skillshare volunteer experiences in Southern Africa (Judge, 2004).

Cliff Allum said:

Even for those active in this struggle, it is not just the dramatic and tragic events which are striking in their accounts, but the ordinariness, the routine quality of the lived struggle, that is evoked in these testimonials. Phyliss Naidoo getting up at five o’clock to do the cooking; the Lesotho volunteers providing floors for ANC members to sleep on and the simplicity of social networking amongst activists and their supporters as a form of solidarity. That small things play an important role in solidarity is clear from these accounts. (Judge, 2004, p. 59)

Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, illustrated the power of a relational approach to development by acknowledging the many, often small contributions that, in the end helped bring down apartheid:

Through individual accounts we learn that people contributed in seemingly small but important ways according to what they could do or could afford. It was as a result of such efforts globally, that we were able to see the downfall of the apartheid regime. It is such efforts that we now need to fight and win the war against poverty and the injustices of our world today. (Judge, 2004, p. 8)
In other words the work of international volunteers far from being imperialist, can promote change for justice as Skillshare International proclaimed:

Skillshare International has a long tradition of enabling volunteers to assist in the development of the communities and countries of Southern Africa. It is a tradition which has opposed apartheid and the injustice experienced as a consequence of colonialism and it remains one of great potential in organisational and social transformation in Southern Africa. (Judge, 2004, p. 11)

As Cliff Allum Skillshare International’s CEO said:

The struggle for a just world never really ends. As the people and governments of southern Africa unite to address historical injustices and the socio-economic challenges that the region faces, Skillshare International and its international volunteers will be present in comradeship and solidarity. (Judge, 2004, p. 59)

Skillshare’s annual review 2007-8 shows 58% of its budget came from DFID (Skillshare International, 2008a, p. 21). However in parallel with this, Skillshare has been broadening its organisational governance accountabilities. So in 2008-9 Skillshare International adapted its governance framework to “better reflect the regions in which we work” including for example a nominee from the boards of Skillshare Ireland and Skillshare In India Trust along with nominations from Africa (Skillshare International, 2008a, p. 5, 2009).

Progressio

CIIR was formed in the UK in 1965 with an education and overseas volunteer program that in 2006 changed its name to Progressio. CIIR was a renamed version of an ecumenical organisation formed in 1940 “in response to the silence of the Catholic church’s hierarchy in the face of the rise of fascism” (Progressio, 2006d). Initially volunteer assignments “were linked to the church” but the overseas program “gradually took on a serious development perspective” not limited by religious affiliation and the organisation today continues “to work with, and be staffed by, people of all faiths and none” (Progressio, 2006d). As a result, from 1966 and continuing today the volunteer
program has received significant UK government support. Today this support is structured, as with other UK IVCOs like VSO and Skillshare International, through a several year Partnership Program Agreement (PPA) with DFID that is periodically reviewed. In 2004/05 Progressio gained 50% of its funding through the PPA (Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2005, p. 2).

Progressio emphasises the work of its recruits as professional and focused on development distinguishing its work from unskilled volunteer connotations. It says that while originally called a volunteer program: “the organization does not recruit 'volunteers'. We recruit and place skilled professional development workers to do specific jobs in response to needs identified by our partners in the South” (Progressio, 2006d).

Progressio highlights its geographic focus and approach of working through skillsharing and advocacy and now recruiting a majority of its development workers from the South.

Progressio (2006e) works in partnership with organisations across 11 countries of Latin America, The Middle East and Asia. They describe themselves as:

An international development agency that works in countries around the world through sharing skills and advocating policy, summed up by our strapline ‘Changing Minds –Changing Lives’. We challenge the causes and structures of poverty through placing skilled Development Workers (DWs) with partners in the South, advocating change based on that experience. We are independent of church structures, working with people of all faiths and none. (p. 3)

An example of the way Progressio encourages advocacy among its volunteers and supporters is its ongoing campaign on terminator seeds. Alongside others it successfully lobbied for a continued ban at the UN Convention on biological diversity meeting in May 2008 (Progressio, 2008).
In 2004/5, Progressio had 83 development workers overseas from 30 different countries - 40 per cent from the North and 60 per cent from the South. As a snapshot of this, there were 11 development workers in Nicaragua, four from the UK, Belgium and Spain and seven from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Honduras. At the same time eight development workers in Somaliland were from six countries: Canada, Ethiopia, Philippines, Ireland, Somalia and Zimbabwe (Progressio, 2006b).

Progressio describes the values and goals underpinning “its work as a development agency” in the following manner:

To eradicate poverty and exclusion through challenging unjust political, social and economic structures locally and globally;

the full and active participation of the poorest, most excluded groups in decision-making which works to reduce vulnerabilities stemming from conflict, war and environmental degradation;

an equitable distribution of resources and power between men and women and between communities and nations;

basic rights, cultural diversity and multi-cultural understanding. (Progressio, 2006c)

Progressio has prioritised what it terms ‘three development themes’: Civil society participation, HIV and AIDS and Sustainable environment: “Promoting the rational use and management of natural resources for the benefit of future generations” (Progressio, 2006a). Progressio’s openly political approach along with others, saw significant support through volunteers for the Sandinista government and NGOs in Nicaragua in the 1980s as part of the trans-national civil society response to the US government support to the ‘contras’.
Finnish Service Centre for Development

In 1985 the Service Centre for Development (KEPA) was created as a “politically and ideologically non aligned” umbrella organisation for Finnish NGOs “interested in development work and global issues” (KEPA, 2006). Also in 1985 the Finnish Council of State decided to finance from State development cooperation funds a Finnish Volunteer Service and gave KEPA the responsibility for establishing and managing the FVS. Zambia was chosen as the first country to receive Finnish volunteers partly as a result of its positive response to the 1984 Parliamentary Report into establishing a FVS, which had consulted various countries about their interest. Zambia was also at that time one of the key partners in official Finnish technical cooperation and an agreement to set up the program in Zambia was signed in 1987 (Longwe, Clarke, Torvinen, & Vuorela, 1991, p. 18). Subsequently the program also operated in Nicaragua and Mozambique. In 1995 KEPA was evaluated and the results were described as a ‘bombshell’ to KEPA whose major focus since its creation had been to do with administering the FVS. FVS was heavily criticised by the evaluation and led to KEPA seeking different directions as the FVS was phased out (Peberdy, et al., 2005). After 1995 KEPA altered its focus on technical assistance and started a scaled down “global education program” for volunteers to work for 6-12 months with NGOs in the South that have existing relationships with Finnish NGOs (KEPA, 2006).

The demise of the FVS became a rallying point for those critical of IVCOs and wanting evidence to support their case. For this reason it is interesting to know something of the conclusions of the KEPA evaluation which was deeply critical of the FVS part of KEPA’s work while concluding KEPA’s other work in information and campaigning was ‘functioning well’ (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. xv). The executive summary explains the aim of the evaluation as determining the relevance of the FVS results in relation to
its main objectives of “developmental contribution, bridge building and internationalization” (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. x). It set its context as one in which:

Interest in aid amongst the general public in Finland has waned, the ideological backcloth and political interest in aid has receded and technocratic decision-making has become more dominant. Finland is following the DAC philosophy of reviewing its aid spending and the related choices more critically to ensure value for money and effectiveness as well as providing better accountability of its choices to the Finnish taxpayers. (pp. x, xi)

The KEPA evaluation noted concern among multi and bilateral donors about poor performance in aid and particularly technical assistance and the resulting new focus on institutional development and capacity building. Such approaches, it said, ‘indicate the importance of greater recipient government and beneficiary participation in the design and execution of initiatives; greater involvement of national consultants and staff; and a reduction in full time international technical assistance staff and gap-filling’ (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. xi). It recognised however that: “while this strategy seems ideologically founded on the principle of self determination, the measures and modalities to carry it out throw up significant paradoxes” (p. xi). It highlighted the problem that those most dependant on aid are also least able to manage institutional or capacity development on their own. It also noted that influenced by critical public opinion at home, donors found it difficult to untie aid and allow recipient governments to manage it because of the need to account for the spending at home. This is indeed a paradox for IVCOs who want to place volunteers in local organisations at their request and under their management, while increasingly being expected to guarantee results to funders. The Paris Principles for Aid Effectiveness provide a framework more amenable to the IVCO relational approach while not surrendering attention to results.

The KEPA evaluation report suggested that while some criteria for volunteer selection was similar to other technical assistance personnel, they were unique in terms of
technical assistance because they “belong to a world grounded in the principles of solidarity, partnership, sharing of living conditions and bridge building to the home country” (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. xi). It said the technical cooperation critiques of the time had influenced the IVCO’s work and how they were perceived, but missed their “ideological or philosophical basis of linkage” as they were “bereft of ideology or philosophy but awash with technocracy” (p. xi). It also commented that as discussed earlier: “to the international aid community, volunteers and volunteer sending organizations are seen as a sort of ‘add on’ ” (p. xi).

The FVS program was described by the KEPA evaluation as “a collection of fairly different postings with some emphasis on the social and forestry sectors” (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. xiii). It identified that volunteers felt that “their views are not being taken into account as much as they would like them to be” and “that their experience in the field is not being used to best advantage” (p. xiv). The report claimed the program designers expected a modest ‘developmental impact’ but felt the program could be justified because of the importance of “Finnish development information and education” it would provide (p. xiv). The report concluded:

The FVS programme as a whole is of limited relevance. The FVS programme provides a modest contribution to the developmental objective albeit appreciation is positive by the majority of hosts but there are mixed reactions from other actors. Relative to the objective of internationalization, …the programme is a success insofar as the experience abroad is found to be an enriching experience by nearly all volunteers. The bridge building objective is only, in part, realized. (p. xvi)

It said the “volunteers end up being accountable to a number of parties who may monitor either the same or different aspects of their work” and that “even if all agree that the volunteer programme cannot or should not be more strictly result-oriented, FINNIDA still has responsibility to justify how taxes are being spent” (p. xviii).
The KEPA experience is illuminating because its evaluation draws out critical contextual factors as well as operational ones. It highlights the importance of discussing volunteer linking roles as well as efficiency and efficacy when comparing against other ‘hard’ technical assistance options when there are limited resource allocations for overseas aid. It spells out the paradox of trying to achieve self determination and capacity development while not having control over the technical assistance provided because volunteers work within local organisations. It also demonstrates the difficulty of this way of operating when accountability for funding is felt to fall back to Northern taxpayers who have been schooled to expect evidence based ‘results’, (especially quantified ones), that are often difficult to provide in development, particularly in capacity development using community development approaches. Qualitative accounts can often offer additional and deeper insights.

**Austraining International**

Austraining’s website describes itself as an Australian company which “manages international activity for its owner, the South Australian Government, particularly the Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology (DFEEST)” (Austraining, 2006b). It “provides world class project management and training solutions specializing in human resource development in Australia and internationally” and “strives to improve the quality of life in developing countries through the design and management of development assistance projects with organisations such as the World Bank; Asian Development Bank and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)” (Austraining, 2006b).

Austraining clearly does not describe itself as a volunteer sending agency; however, Austraining runs two volunteer programs the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development and Volunteering for International Development from Australia (VIDA)
programs. Beyond these the Austraining website only mentions “specialized volunteer services and management” under the list of work its active data base of ‘specialised consultants’ provide (Austraining, 2006a).

The Australian Youth Ambassador Program (AYAD) was for a period the only Australian volunteer program to have information directly hosted on the AusAID website. There it had explained that:

AYAD was launched in 1998 by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, to strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and the countries of the Asia Pacific and make a positive contribution to development. The program places skilled young Australians, aged 18-30, on short-term assignments of between 3-12 months, in developing countries throughout the Asia Pacific region. The program offers young people a wonderful opportunity to contribute to development while at the same time learning about other cultures….Youth Ambassadors use their skills and expertise to actively contribute to international development. They gain an increased understanding of the development needs of our neighbouring countries and broaden their experience by living and working in a cross-cultural environment. (AusAID, 2006)

Austraining has been managing the young people’s AYAD program since it first won the tender put out by AusAID in 2000 after a two year pilot of the program (Austraining, 2006c). VIDA, Austraining’s other volunteer program, was created as part of its successful tender bid when the Australian government’s other support for Australian volunteers overseas was tendered out in 2004. As a result of this tender process three agencies, AVI, Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) and Austraining, won contracts while IVCO PALMS, which had previously been supported by AusAID, was not successful. The VIDA program does not have the age constraints the AYAD program has. It has its own website linked to the Austraining website which states:

VIDA is an Australian Government program that places skilled Australian volunteers in developing countries in the Asia Pacific region. VIDA volunteers work with local people to share knowledge, develop sustainable skills and build the capacity of communities and their environments in line with Australian Government priorities and the Millennium Development Goals. (Austraining, 2010)
Independent IVCO Characteristics

Drawing on Pinkau’s conclusions about features of an effective VDS and using the preceding descriptions of independent IVCOs and comparing them with the KEPA and Austraining cases, common characteristics of independent IVCOs can be summarised as follows:

- they are development NGOs that use long term skilled and qualified international volunteers as a significant part of their broad development strategies which include tackling global and local causes of poverty and injustice through practical action and advocacy;
- they recruit volunteers from North and South but mainly work in the South though some work in Eastern Europe or occasionally in the North in areas of need or advocacy;
- they respond to requests in the South for volunteers from government and NGOs and work in partnership with the local organisation;
- they provide preparation and support to volunteers during, prior and post assignment;
- they are autonomous organisations that have direct and broad participatory civil society governance in their home country and in many cases bodies representing partner organisations in the South;
- they are not for profit bodies that receive government funding to complement in kind and financial support from individuals, community organisations, philanthropic trusts and the corporate sector;
- they encourage volunteers to live and work under local conditions and pay volunteers at locally comparable rates;
- they encourage skills and experiences exchange rather than skills transfer.
Conclusion

Organisations sending international volunteers overseas have at times been accused of focusing too much on the volunteers’ experience and not enough on their impact on the receivers or ‘served’ (McBride & Daftary, 2005). However for agencies focused on volunteers and development, the opposite can sometimes be the case. Indeed the history and construction of international volunteer sending agencies are to some extent shaped by the perception that international volunteers are just a tool for their development goals. Because of this, international volunteers have at times been considered expendable and easily dispensed with in favour of the more conventional use of contracted experts, policy change and funding. However this trend has been fought by the independent IVCOs I have described. They see the meld of volunteering and development as a complementary and unique endeavour that produces an effective synergy for development and this explains their reluctance to relinquish the volunteer personnel side of their work. My research suggests that combining volunteering and development may produce a ‘value adding’ that can in the words of the UNDP administrator help ‘redefine development’.

Some key characteristics that emerge are that, contrary to some common critiques and perceptions, independent IVCOs may not be characterised simply as paternalistic or state dominated responses to symptoms of poverty. Even where these criticisms might have been levelled initially or historically, most have evolved into more sophisticated and thoughtful development responses to NS power differentials and other important constraints to structural change, capacity development and local ownership. The independent IVCO examples demonstrate this. All use international volunteers in creative ways not simply to achieve development outcomes in the South but also by using international volunteers as a networking and advocacy tool for global change for
example via the make poverty history campaign or the campaign against terminator seed technology which Progressio joined.

Equally important are characteristics of volunteers and the conditions they work under overseas. The independent IVCOs discussed recruit significantly higher proportions of women in their programs than conventional forms of technical assistance for development. The 1995 evaluation of KEPA, occasionally regarded as an indictment on international volunteer agencies and volunteers, can be seen as an important lens for assessing the contextual contribution of IVCOs. It intimates that, beyond a technocratic approach to development, it is important to also consider the other ‘value adding’ elements that IVCOs provide beyond simple value for money and effectiveness measures. This is a crucial message particularly when we are in an increasing international aid period rather than a contracting one like when the KEPA evaluation was conducted. International volunteers may have a special and complementary role in the development sector. This is particularly so if more funds for the MDGs are seen as a mixed blessing for Capacity Development because of the potentially overwhelming effect of plans and money when limited absorptive capacity exists in some of the most crucial areas needing attention (Therkildsen, 2005).

AVI’s roots show international volunteering started more with the idea of accompaniment under local conditions than helping. This set the tone for relationships of solidarity rather than paternalism even though practical results were also achieved on the foundation of trust and understanding. UNV demonstrates the international agreement among UN member states for voluntary service for development that recruits volunteers with appropriate skills, from North and South, to go only where requested. UNV also set the goal early for recruiting a majority of international volunteers from the
South. This has since been followed by others like VSO and Progressio. VSO was one of the first independent IVCOs to emphasise its unique role as a development agency using volunteers and promote and document this as its strategic advantage and niche. VSO also pioneered the programmatic work of IVCOs and incorporated a concern for environment and development as part of its ongoing secure livelihoods program.

Independent IVCOs, in particular, may have a crucial complementary role in the development sector as non governmental and non commercial organisations that work with others for international development primarily through the use of international volunteers. IVCOs sit most comfortably with development agencies over Northern and national volunteer agencies even though they are not, on the surface, openly embraced in either sector. Development NGOs have at times regarded IVCOs as not developmentally correct or paternalistic because of their use of outside volunteers rather than just working through local people. What has often been neglected is the way the outside volunteers work in local organisations under local conditions and direction. Irene Pinkau’s historic study found that IVCOs or what she termed volunteer development services (VDS) worked in practical on the ground ways in the South as well as tackling the causes of global poverty in the North and globally. The IVCO examples detailed in this chapter only reinforce her conclusions.

The independent IVCOs niche or characteristics fit well with the current Paris Declaration principles and the consensus around a new aid paradigm identified by the Stern evaluation (E. D. Stern, et al., 2008). The independent IVCO approach also fits other elements discussed in Chapter Three including the idea of an indirect approach to achieving development goals that enhances local ownership, autonomy, capacity development and the importance of culture and civil society for trans-national social
learning. These all contribute in concrete and synergistic ways to Robinson’s recommendations for sustainability which were foreshadowed as fitting the international volunteers at the end of Chapter Three. Sustainability and international volunteering can be integrating over fields, sectors and scales; encourage new and innovative forms of social learning; complement technical responses with a relational approach using science and local forms of knowledge that varies with contexts; and finally practical and lived experiential learning that can be flexible, responsive and accountable to local needs and priorities.

Independent IVCOs indeed bring a different element to development because of the relational aspect they bring to TA and beyond. This makes international volunteering not just a tool for development but something that potentially amplifies the scope of development and fosters the double meaning of ‘the development of voluntary solidarity’ (Devereux, 2002). Chapters Five and Six test the potential for synergy with evidence from analysing the characteristics, thinking and recognition of international volunteers according to first volunteers themselves (Chapter Five) and then other stakeholders (Chapter Six).
Chapter 5: Development, environment and international volunteers – on the ground experiences

Development, sustainability and international volunteers

Development is a broad concept that should present a vision for ‘positive change’; account for the historical processes of social change; and acknowledge the dominant contemporary emphasis on development as practice focusing on deliberate efforts at improvement (Thomas, 2000, pp. 3-9). The focus on improvement has emphasised a global response to poverty, under-emphasising other elements of interdependence, injustice, inequality, consumption and power relations that should be fundamental considerations within a broader vision of development. The response to poverty has largely been through technical cooperation as a way of responding to poverty but this has been heavily critiqued over the last twenty years resulting in the promotion of the newer concept of capacity development.

Capacity development is a way of providing technical cooperation while encouraging local ownership. It is also a way of tackling what has been identified as the ‘conundrum of assisted self reliance’ articulated by Ellerman (2004). Capacity development enables learning from, and building on, local knowledge and strengths with external knowledge and support, thus contributing to better and reciprocal change and development. I contend capacity development deepens our conception of development and takes us beyond the bounds of technical and narrow economic models of sustainable development that have a tendency toward an instrumental view of environmental protection. This broader view of sustainable development can be conceptualised by the more recent, integrated and deeper concept of sustainability (Robinson, 2004). In this chapter I will investigate, whether the concepts of capacity development, sustainability
and a relational view of development can be seen in practice through international ‘environmental volunteers’ working side by side with local people to achieve broad and deep development.

The linking of capacity, development and sustainability requires the explicit embrace of reciprocal processes. These not only encourage ownership among developing communities but also encourage learning and change in the North through a relational approach to development (Eyben, 2008; Netherwood, Buchanan, Stocker, & Palmer, 2006; Slife, 2004). Such a relational approach to development puts people and their interactions with the environment, institutions and each other as central to successful technical cooperation and partnership.

This chapter analyses survey data detailing the perspective of 30 international volunteers. It considers whether their thinking and practice corresponds firstly to the broad development approach I have outlined, secondly to the ideals of the independent International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations that facilitate their placements and thirdly to the other stakeholders, particularly the partner or host organisations that request their collaboration.

**The survey of international ‘environmental’ volunteers**

IVCO assistance from AVI, UNV, VSO, Skillshare International, Progressio and Austraining International allowed survey distribution to volunteers in environment related fields, a comparatively small subset of their total numbers. From these facilitating IVCOs, 30 volunteers or recently returned volunteers (15 women, 15 men) responded individually to the request. The surveys were received between July 2004 and October 2006 during or after assignments in Indonesia, China, Papua New Guinea, Eritrea, Thailand, Cambodia, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Lesotho, Indonesia,
Malawi, Mongolia Nepal, Samoa and Sri Lanka. From NVivo analysis major themes were identified and/or confirmed with the highest rated themes being mentioned by greater than 65% of volunteers and the lowest reflecting the views of at least 20%.

The themes that emerged from the volunteer survey were then re-grouped under research questions two, three, and four:

2. What features characterise the role of international volunteers?

3. Is it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers and/or others, as a result of the work together? and

4. How are international volunteers recognised in the development sector?

I will now summarise the responses under these headings in order of the frequency of volunteers mentioning them.

In Appendix 4 I provide a summary of key issues expressed by the volunteers in terms of percentages of the total surveyed in the categories from the survey. These will be addressed using quotes from the survey and are presented to ‘bring to life’ the voices of the volunteers and their perspectives.

**Characteristics of international volunteers**

The international volunteers highlighted 17 elements that they regarded as key elements of their role in the development sector. These, in order of numbers of volunteers (out of the total of 30) who mentioned them, were:

- being locally accountable (20);
- the ethos, preparation and support of the international volunteer cooperation organisation (IVCO) that facilitated their assignment (19);
- cultural aspects (18);
• engaging with personal aspects (18);
• the importance of learning (15);
• living and working under local conditions and the work/social mix (14);
• trust and understanding (14);
• adopting an appropriate pace of change (13);
• contributions to capacity development (12);
• coping with power and resource constraints (12);
• being motivated (12);
• flexibility in work and Terms of Reference (11);
• respect for volunteer status (11);
• strength of relationships (11);
• collaborative work (10);
• being present for an extended period (9); and,
• local ownership (10).

All of these features or characteristics were mentioned by between 65% and 20% of the volunteers who completed the survey.

**Being locally accountable**

Local accountability as a unique/special feature of international volunteers has emerged as the most highly rated theme from the volunteer surveys (20 sources or over 65%). The volunteers reflected this firstly by talking of their integration within local organisations or their status as employees with some also noting how this accountability extends in a second instance to the IVCO facilitating their assignment. Secondly volunteers express what this local accountability and integration means in regard to responding appropriately to local preferences and ways of working. Thirdly survey
respondents express how local accountability affects the way the volunteer work is conducted including some of the opportunities, difficulties, frustrations and compromises which this involves.

One volunteer described herself as part of the existing team rather than in a position of power:

> we go into organisations not with the intention of taking over and trying to change the world but instead we go into organizations with the intention of being part of the existing team, to work with them and learn from them as much as help them. We are not in a position of ‘power’ and we work within the parameters of the existing organisations. (Anne AV13)

Another described himself as operating as a regular public servant:

> As a public servant I have to work in accordance with government policies etc. Although as a volunteer I may be able to get away with some things that local colleagues would not, such an approach is detrimental in the long term. I have chosen to integrate as much as possible as a regular Samoan public servant. (Kevin AV18)

However, local work conditions and norms were not always easy for volunteers to adapt to, for example, having to adjust to formal and hierarchical local structures:

> Everyone stood up for the boss when he entered the office. Yes, it was hard I suppose working in that hierarchical environment, but it’s part of the process and part of working in Sri Lanka. (Ruth AV1 RV4)

As a subset of accountability issues over 30% of volunteers acknowledged the importance of local direction support and knowledge for making difficult decisions.

For example successive local government officers were influential and crucial to the success of each stage of the government program that one volunteer worked on:

> The Chief District Officers had the most influence over the type of work that I did and the amount that I was able to achieve. During my placement there were 3 Chief District Officers, the first was particularly influential in the project planning and establishment phase, the second who was there for most of the time I was there, took me to meet many of the people in the local community and promoted the objectives of the project with great enthusiasm. The third Chief District Officer continued to support the
program which ensured that all the deliverables could be achieved. These were not the individuals that initially requested a Volunteer but they were best placed to promote the project at a District level, which was the level that the project was targeted at and I found their support to be crucial to the success of the project. (Jenny AVI RV2)

Also in direct relation to accountability issues as a broad category, more than 35% of volunteers felt that who most influenced their work was important.

As the above example indicates, local managers were influential in providing direction and important to have on side to achieve local change. Understanding organisational objectives and developing a work plan that fit in with this was also important. Two different volunteers highlighted this:

*The organisation has a Director who has strong views on the organisation’s strategic direction and the work which she would like to be seen done. This has been very important for me and how I work. An important part of my learning process has been developing an appreciation of the variety of work tasks which the organisation aspires to; planning specific, realistic activities for myself and colleagues which meet these objectives; and making meaningful input into plans for the organisations strategic direction.* (Alexander SK4)

*The director at PPLH and the leader of the program team tend to have the most influence over the type of work I do. I need their input and value their contributions as I want to help them change practice, etc. without causing offence or trying to do too much too quickly. I am taking baby steps every day but quite a bit of change has already occurred.* (Anne AVI3)

In other words local accountability was crucial for volunteers in order that they could both respond to local expectations and needs and foster required change through close and respectful relations.

**IVCO ethos preparation and support**

The second top coded theme with over 60% of volunteers mentioning its importance as special/unique aspect of international volunteering was their IVCO’s ethos-preparation and support.
The responses highlighted the way volunteers identified with and felt that the IVCO facilitating their and others’ assignments had a particular ethos that provided a specific philosophy and practical framework for their development activities and outlook captured by the phrase ‘living, working, learning’ in the volunteer recruitment campaign of one IVCO. This was related partly to the longer term development partnership between the IVCO and the local organisation.

Living and working under local conditions contributed to the merging of volunteers’ work and social life. Many volunteers found it hard living under local conditions so different to what they were used to (particularly for volunteers from the North) but they also accepted this to some extent as part of the volunteer ethos:

*Living and working in a developing country comes with another side – it’s not just about work – there’s the living part – as a volunteer you have to catch the smelly crowded bus, wash everything by hand, go without things, cope with the heat (and bugs), etc….Living was also working – and at times it was tiring…but that’s part of it I guess.* (Ruth AVI RV4)

The partnership between the IVCO and the local host set the tone for the volunteer’s work and this was operationalised by the local staff, organisational structure and volunteer’s ideas:

*Initially of course it is the partnership between Skillshare and the host country organization that influenced the work, but this had also been influenced by the previous development worker in my position. Now I am in country it is a mixture between the commission members I work with, my two counterparts and my own influence on how to move forward.* (Yameni SK2)

There was recognition of IVCO’s recruiting skilled expertise to ‘share’ rather than just ‘transfer’ skills within existing structures and the local visions of host organisations and countries:

*Skillshare Development Workers appear to be highly skilled in their areas of expertise. The Skillshare approach of ‘sharing skills’ is far less paternalistic than many aid agencies. We do not have national political mandates to follow like national aid agencies or specialist aid agencies and*
therefore can work far more organically within the existing structures and visions in our host countries/organizations. (Yameni SK2)

There was interestingly a strong sense of accountability first to the local partner organisation and only secondly to the IVCO:

My decisions as a volunteer are based on my own ethics and what I believe would affect the reputation of both AVI and Pekerti. I feel that I'm firstly an employee of Pekerti and then I have a duty to AVI. (Patrick AVI1)

However, while volunteers clearly felt a primary obligation to the local organisation they worked for, they also expected IVCO assistance to do this effectively. As a result, there was solid and frequent mention by volunteers of the importance of IVCO preparation, backup and support to create realistic expectations while also giving practical guidance and encouragement:

I believe that Australian Volunteers International is very experienced at what they do and they did an excellent job of preparing me for what I might encounter while in my placement and guiding me as to how I should behave in certain situations by informing me of what other volunteers have experienced. AVI also provided me with a tremendous amount of support during my placement. I was able to draw on what I learnt during my preparation for departure and the support and guidance they gave me in-country to reconcile differences where possible. However, they also prepared me to accept that in many cases differences would remain irreconcilable and situations would be imperfect and my best response would be to get on and do what I could with what I had. (Jenny AVI RV2)

Cultural aspects

Cultural aspects emerged as crucial in the volunteer work and approach from 60% of volunteers. Cultural understanding was seen as important not only for responding appropriately to community needs, but also as a way of showing respect for local people and appreciating and learning from cultural diversity, for example by learning a local language. This was an element volunteers felt official aid players did not sufficiently address.

The things you get to understand as a volunteer are all cultural – you know what to say when, how to get something done, what gets respect and what doesn't. Depending on the work this can be crucial for carrying out work
appropriate to the needs of the community and this is the thing that official aid falls down in time and time again. (Martin AVI RV3)

More than just distinct in the volunteer role, engaging with local culture was suggested as integral to how international volunteering is defined, including potentially the notion of reciprocal benefit:

it’s a willingness to engage with local culture. This is part of the definition of being a volunteer. The advantages of this are personal, in that you as the volunteer learn a lot and empower individuals to understand that they are not inferior to others from the West. However, this highly localized impact can make it difficult to get broader based support from established, institutionalized assistance. (Martin AVI RV3)

Volunteers also articulated the difficult compromises that were required within local structures and cultures in order to foster solid long term positive relationships and work together. The closeness in a cultural and social sense had direct implications for the pace and outcomes of the work because of the importance of managing and sustaining relationships:

Having to work with people over an extended period means that you want to maintain good relationships. So often at the expense of an outcome that you know should happen, you might back down as you see it may negatively affect the relationship you are having with a colleague. And because relationships are so important (in that people won’t share the reality of their work, and be generally open) damaging the respect you worked hard to get through pushing and essentially losing face (extremely bad in Asian culture) is not worth it. I feel you can’t be so forthright in your approach as you work so closely with the local people. (Les YAD4)

Understanding the local language was frequently seen as a key example of engaging with local culture in a practical and respectful way. This had significant ramifications for life and work and for those with a good understanding of local colloquial language, allowed a more rounded appreciation of work issues as they emerged both inside and outside formal work settings:

In terms of my role as an Indonesian-speaking volunteer compared to a fluent Indonesian-speaking Project Scientist, I couldn’t tell you as I never met one. The distinction between fluency and non-fluency is large. Indonesian is taught in Australia in its formal register, and a working knowledge of the formal language will still not be enough to bridge the
cultural gap. For that you need to speak everyday Indonesian and understand everyday Indonesian culture well enough to chat outside and around work. I am sure Indonesia is not the only developing country where most important dialogue takes place outside the office. (Judy AV16)

Communication was diminished when volunteers had limited language proficiency given there were usually only rare opportunities for volunteers to have interpreters. However, respect could also be gained when volunteers took seriously the task of learning and applying language and there was personal growth for the volunteer from such learning:

There are positives and negatives also with the language barrier. For consultants this may not be a problem because they may be provided with interpreters (I was for all my assignments as a consultant in India and China). The volunteer however must try to get by. The positives of this are that from a personal perspective you learn a new language which is a fulfilling achievement. Also positive is that the local people recognise your attempts to speak their language and this improves inter-cultural understanding. On the negative side communication is obviously diminished when a volunteer has only a rudimentary understanding of the language. ... Although we were given 6 weeks of intensive Indonesian language training, this does not equip you to discuss higher order concepts in the local language. As well, people in the villages speak Javanese, which is different to Indonesian, thus reinforcing the language barrier. (Stephen AV14)

**Engaging with personal aspects**

Sixty percent of the volunteers reflected on personal aspects (as also mentioned above in cultural aspects) as an important part of the development process which not only was personally fulfilling (for example by learning a local language) but also assisted their work. They also noted the diversity evident in different volunteers’ personalities beyond a straightforward typology of volunteer characteristics. In other words, there was clear expression that volunteers would bring their personality to the volunteer experience, as mentioned for example when discussing motivation. Similarly highlighted was the importance of personal contacts or networks for volunteers’ effective work practice.
One volunteer described the way her interest in the personal lives of her local work colleagues demonstrated a genuine interest that made people comfortable with her presence:

*I spend a lot of time chatting to the staff about their personal lives, joking around, teaching them new English words, showing them photos from Australia, telling them about my life in Australia etc. This interaction helps them to realize that they can relax around me and that I don’t need to be treated as someone special. I feel that they enjoy having my company because I’m interesting to them.*

(Lyn YAD1)

Personal ties of volunteers made people more willing to exchange ideas freely with ‘outsiders’ linked to the volunteers and their work: “We can also introduce our leaders/experts to the locals we have some personal ties with which makes everyone more comfortable and allows ideas to be exchanged more freely” (Les YAD4).

Another volunteer described the levelling effect of close interactions with local people while using broader personal contacts to help draw support for her work with the community:

*I spent much more time in the village than normal development workers do. I use my personal connections to get various tasks done (website design, posters), raise money through my personal network, spend my weekends in the village, pretending to be a tourist so that the villagers could practice etc. The level of dedication is very different and the level of interaction is much closer. I am not perceived as a know-it-all, who is better than the villagers are.*

(Marleen VSO1)

**Learning**

As also discussed above, learning was seen as important from 50% of survey respondents. There was emphasis on volunteers combining learning and helping as well as encouraging learning in others. This was reflected by volunteers talking about how their work involved learning on both sides which was a delicate process that also involved compromise. Sensitivity to this was linked in a number of cases with IVCO ethos/preparation. Personal learning was reflected in people’s learning about local language, culture and resourcefulness as fulfilling in themselves while also building
stronger local relationships and respect and enhancing local pride and self confidence.
Encouraging learning in others was important and partly relied on volunteers modelling this despite the initial challenge to expectations or stereotypes that volunteers as outside ‘experts’ should already know. Volunteers also identified the importance of local willingness to learn but acknowledged local fears of experimentation and learning. Volunteers modelled their own learning as an example to local people as well as drawing on other expertise and information as a basis for deciding what to do next.

For example one volunteer acknowledged learning as part of the ethos promoted by the IVCO program. SK4 acknowledged that it took time but allowed different ways of working, communicating and getting the job done:

*I think the ability [for the Development worker (DW)] to learn from colleagues and to develop new personal and technical skills in the host organisation/developing country is a particular strong point of the Skillshare programme (as well, of course, as the DW building capacity in the organisation). I would think that shorter-term consultancies or placements, whilst valuable, do not generally give the DW such time to appreciate different ways of working, communicating and getting the job done.* (Alexander SK4)

**Living and working under local conditions and work/social mix**

Also considered important under characteristics of international volunteers were living under local conditions and the mix between work and social life that this allows. This was noted by over 45% of sources. Volunteers expressed how important this physical proximity and shared experience was for developing positive social relations both within and outside work. This paved the way beyond personal learning for respect, deeper understanding of local resource constraints and effective work together.

Volunteers believed living and working under local conditions allowed unique interactions and relationships to develop in ways that were more difficult for many other aid workers:
I strongly believe that consultants and contract staff would not have the opportunity to engage in the interactions I mentioned above. The length of time we are stationed for allows us to establish relationships with the staff and local people, so that they get used to having us around. The way in which we live and work also ensures that we have close interactions with local people. I catch the bus to and from work everyday, I shop with local people, I live next to a Sri Lankan family, I go to the office/field everyday and interact with ordinary Sri Lankan people. (Lyn YAD1)

The parity in work conditions and closeness of working relationships were significant according to many volunteers and could break stereotypes on both sides:

*It is the closeness of work relationship between the volunteer and local counterparts that makes all the difference. We are on even level (to the extent possible and often depending on volunteer's personality) and most of the barriers are not there (we do not bring money, we do not have more money than they do, we work together in the field, sleep and eat in the same room in villages). This type of relationship also breaks misconceptions Cambodians have about foreigners, as we appear as normal people.* (Marleen VSO1)

Integration with local communities strengthened relationships and understanding but also brought with it a responsibility for the way volunteers felt they should live, work and respond effectively:

*By being visible for such a long time, and people seeing you adapt to their way of life (food, language, customs etc), I feel strengthens understandings, and perhaps even on a diplomatic level can be used as a tool to smooth or enhance national relationships. I definitely think you have more of a responsibility in the way you carry out your life and work here, as perhaps your impact is more long-term. The flip side to this is that what you do should be more effective and targeted as you should be more aware of the reality of the situation.* (Jane YAD5)

Different cultural expectations were demonstrated for volunteers living under local conditions and communicating in the local language, despite the obvious advantages:

*Besides the obvious advantage of clarity of intention, people tended to have different expectations of me. I found non-Indonesian speakers are generally treated with complete abandon of Indonesian customs, which was not the case for me. For example, a young unmarried woman visiting alone as an expert is not judged by her marital status… whereas after a few short months I was heavily questioned by the full spectrum of Indonesian customs and expectations of a young unmarried woman.* (Judy AVI6)
In other words the ‘expert’ unmarried young woman was not judged by local expectations. By contrast the international volunteer, living and working under local conditions and speaking the local language well was significantly scrutinised according to what local people regarded as appropriate in their culture.

Efforts to learn the local language and culture along with the extended stay and limited remuneration compared to other foreign staff, was also seen to raise local respect and hence work effectiveness:

*I do think my status not being too high was important in getting more real information about what each party really wanted. Not only that I was told more, but also just the ability to read between the lines. .... my Australian counterparts would tee up sampling trips and check and double check that the Indo counterpart was all fine to go, etc and then they would get into the field and the Indo counterpart would just not turn up, because a certain comment they had made had been misinterpreted. I would then usually be asked to follow up for a quick resolution and at that point they would explain in Indonesian, the same sentence having a very different meaning (cultural use of indirectness).* (Judy AVI6B)

‘Working alongside’ was a phrase commonly used by volunteers to describe the way they conduct their work with local colleagues. This was mentioned by over 35% of respondents. As one volunteer said:

*I believe working as an everyday member of staff builds close relationships and respect from peers. I believe that through building up a sense of trust, people are more likely to share information and want to work cooperatively.* (Ben YAD2)

In other words the help of local people and the close working relationship with them helped volunteers understand the specific ‘lay of the land’ that may be more distant for aid players who do not work together on a day to day basis with the resulting confidence and trust:

*I think development workers can assist organizations to develop organically, working with people at their own pace and not imposing deadlines and actions. DW’s can work knowing exactly ‘the lay of the land’ on a particular issue that can only be guessed at by official technical assistance.* (Yameni SK2)
This integration within local structures could however be difficult as well as useful when volunteers felt isolated from technical backup or professional peer support:

*Unique is also the isolated position that development workers have to work in, which makes reflection about work difficult and implementing changes in an organization slow. Unique also is the same level of hierarchy as local staff which makes it more difficult to build up respect (problems settling down, language problems)*. (Peter SK3)

**Trust and understanding**

Related to living under local conditions and the work/social mix this allows is the equally ranked unique aspect of trust and understanding that over 45% of respondents referred to. Many volunteers emphasised how living under local conditions (including local work conditions which are less targeted and more flexible) for an extended period facilitates trust and understanding on both sides. Also discussed was the importance of letting go and allowing people to make mistakes and prove themselves through independent action. There was also recognition that volunteers as outsiders, never fully can understand and therefore must also work with and through local colleagues, who already have better understanding and trust.

Living in close proximity helped understanding: “I think AVIs have a truer understanding of local situations due to the fact they live so closely with the community in which they live” Patrick (AVI1).

Lack of milestones allowed more trust and understanding to grow with time:

*The absence of strict milestone requirements allows the volunteer to work at a pace that is determined by the NGO staff and farmers’ capacities. This means a more relaxed workplace where trust and understanding is developed over time and (probably) leads to improved sustainability after input completion.* (Stephen AVI4)

Intercultural understanding was improved by learning the local language: “Also positive is that the local people recognise your attempts to speak their language and this
improves inter-cultural understanding” (Stephen AVI4). The importance of cultural aspects of understanding, including local language knowledge, has also been highlighted elsewhere. This reflects the overlaps and synergies across many different volunteer features or characteristics identified.

Trust was also conferred on volunteers because of their close working relationships with local colleagues:

Local rural communities have changed some of their practices but this is a result of working with staff with whom they have developed long-term rapport and trust (which is then conferred upon me due to my association with them). (Glen AVI2)

**Contributions to capacity development**

A focus on capacity development was emphasised by 40% of volunteers demonstrating it is obviously an important consideration for them. This is explained by the volunteers in terms of: 1. ‘their’ facilitating IVCO’s expectations for their volunteer work outcomes and 2. in a practical sense because volunteers combine not just resolution of practical issues but also developing processes with local colleagues to build and retain ownership for resolving them over longer periods. A number of volunteers highlighted the importance of flexibility in their work setting which allowed them to mix key factors beyond straightforward technical considerations to fit the local social and political factors and timing necessary. This approach reflected capacity development principles like ‘respecting the value system and fostering self esteem; scanning locally and globally but reinventing locally; integrating external inputs into national priorities, processes and systems; and building on existing capacities rather than creating new ones’ (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003, pp. 3-9). The ‘don’t rush’ capacity development principle (p. 3) was reflected in their practice but sometimes they expressed frustration that the time required for the key capacity development processes encroached on their opportunities to implement their more narrow expertise.
Volunteers noted that capacity development requires time and flexibility that a narrow outcomes focus does not allow:

Most other aid is becoming more and more project dependent requiring ticks in a log frame which is often too ambitious and regulated and doesn’t take into consideration time required for capacity building and skills development. Volunteers bring in external expertise, ideas and experience and also an understanding of methodologies from other countries and a willingness to experiment and research. (Grace SK1)

Volunteers also equated development of capacity with the time they are able to spend because of their broader volunteer ethos in other words:

Building up basic capacities and a deeper understanding of working methods and development philosophies. This because of the time you can spend with staff. (Peter SK3)

**Adopting an appropriate pace of change**

Another characteristic that was identified, as just mentioned above in achieving capacity development, was the issue of keeping in mind the local pace of change, which over 40% of volunteers noted. Volunteers frequently expressed how their less target oriented, more flexible terms of reference, tied to the priorities of the local organisation they worked with, allowed them to work at the appropriate local pace. Moving at this pace allowed trust and relationships to develop without being unduly forced for instrumental or operational reasons to achieve short term outcomes. One person recounts the legacy of a prior volunteer who had pushed heavily for certain outcomes but once gone had left largely resentment and lack of continuity for the work she was advocating.

A more detailed example from one volunteer in Sri Lanka expressed many of the different views captured from diverse volunteers. She explained how progress appeared slow to her even though a lot was happening that she did not see. She clarified that while faster progress could have been done by direct or outside intervention, there was greater ownership for the centre produced, because the local people built it themselves.
Working around contextual constraints like weather, their work and the war she 
gradually learnt from local fisherman the ecological features of the lagoon. This series 
of quotes from Ruth captures her volunteer reflections on the evolution of the work:

Being able to work with my colleagues, being able to understand the way in 
which Sri Lankans worked and the network of relationships that need to be 
in place for the project to work was essential, I needed to be personally 
aware of this to understand why things appeared to sometimes be taking so 
long....when in actual fact there was always something happening, as a 
foreigner you can’t always see it. ... 

Yes, living and working in a community made me feel like we were part of 
the community. It also, I believe, contributed to the long term sustainability 
of the project – in that we worked at the communities pace. ... 

Yes I’m sure a group of international consultants could come in and 
develop all the materials, design a tour, build an education centre – in 
much shorter time and even in a couple of weeks, and probably design an 
education centre that was superior in appearance... but OUR education 
centre was built by the local community. ... 

Our work at times was slow. I worked with the fishermen to identify all the 
ecological features of the lagoon – they told me about their environment – 
pointing out sea eagle’s nests – where elephants come at night and the best 
spot to catch prawns, but it was slow. Sometimes it was raining, sometimes 
they were fishing, sometimes the political situation meant that I couldn’t get 
to the project site. ... 

I have just read over this and it sounds rather ‘rosy’ – at times it was not. It 
was not all apple pie and ice cream. The first two months were a nightmare 
– we arrived to work on another project that fell through – so for the first 
two months we had no home and no job....but it all worked out. (Ruth AVI 
RV4) 

Coping with power and resource constraints

Power and resource constraints were characteristic of their roles according to 40% of 
volunteers. Volunteers discussed their general lack of power and resources which could 
be unfavourably compared to other aid players or favourably acknowledged in that they 
could not impose on colleagues and organisations without separately seeking trust and 
respect so they were listened to. This had ramifications for the pace of collaborative 
work as well as positive implications for the sustainability of what was achieved. It also 
encouraged complementary and collaborative rather than isolated work. 
Because most volunteers had little power, they had to work within organisational parameters in quiet, methodical ways. They sought genuinely local opportunities and interest in change. This helped drive local ownership:

*We are not in a position of ‘power’ and we work within the parameters of the existing organizations.* (Anne AVI3)

Because volunteers did not generally have structured accountability to big aid players and government decision makers they lacked explicit policy influence. As a result, their opportunities to contribute to development were less obvious but potentially also subtly and counter intuitively significant in the mode of a community development approach:

*We do not have the power and money big organizations can use to pressure governments into policy changes. Enforcement of any legislation or any decision at all, is much easier if one has a big organization behind. Volunteers do not have any power, our influence is more subtle.* (Marleen VSO1)

Volunteers with little power or authority, as discussed above, made progress slower and this could be frustrating for them (and others) in the short term:

*A volunteer comes with very little power. No budget, no sanction from a government authority etc. This means that sometimes progress is slower than might otherwise be the case and can cause frustration and a feeling that not much is being achieved.* (Stephen AVI4)

Feelings of a lack of power are only intensified by cultural aspects discussed earlier because as Paige (1993) explains “one of the most consistent research findings regarding intercultural immersion is that sojourners feel they lack control” and as he says this is: “very disconcerting, especially for individuals who need to be and are used to being in control” (p. 12). He says: “If intercultural adjustment, as stressful as it might be, is viewed as a valuable learning opportunity, the sojourner will be better equipped to handle its psychological intensity” (p. 12). Hence the relevance of a volunteer learning focus discussed earlier.
In this context volunteers were forced to be resourceful just as local staff and communities had to be:

*AVIs in general would have a greater degree of resourcefulness that other aid workers wouldn’t have, as they learn to work with such limited funds. This is very important as your local colleagues in the developing world often have to work in the same resource starved situation.* (Patrick AVI1)

Given their lack of power, volunteers were acutely conscious of the importance of political issues as mentioned by over 25% of respondents.

*I am helping to prepare the greenhouse gas inventory, which requires a high level of technical knowledge. However, in order to gather the data for the inventory, I have to work closely with a number of different government ministries. This requires an understanding of the political context, especially the various tensions between different individuals and departments. In addition, in my work I have to be constantly aware of the social/cultural norms that must be observed. This includes saying prayer before meetings, respecting titled men and gift giving.* (Kevin AVI18)

Perhaps also given the lack of power, over 20% of volunteers regarded contextual planning as key. Contextualising decision making and planning was recognised as important to understand what motivates local action and respect this rather than expecting personal values and expectations to take precedence:

*I've tried to contextualize my decision-making in a local framework and, more importantly, understand what is motivating my local peers. There are some situations in the workplace that I would have never tolerated back in Australia – particularly relating to transparency, sign-off and complacency – but here in Thailand, it’s just the way it is and who am I to come in and project my ways of doing things?* (Dora YAD3)

**Being motivated**

Motivation was also considered an important characteristic by 40% of volunteers who discussed the passion for their work as well as times when motivation was challenged by local difficulties like lack of direction or problems of supervision. The difficult experiences required patience, persistence and resilience. Volunteers’ assistance was offered without an expectation of people having to take it up. Volunteers’ motivation was tempered by the knowledge that their own vision might not be realised as originally
intended because of potentially different local priorities or preferences. This inevitable (‘forced’) engagement with other approaches was key for local ownership and embracing of new ideas and practices. However there were also personal expectations that went beyond simply achieving project or workplace outcomes, for example, the satisfaction of developing strong local relationships and trust.

There was a sense from many volunteers that they were received more openly by local people because of their more basic conditions compared to other aid workers.

*I think that the Eritreans are less sceptical about the motives of volunteers who make less money than other fully paid foreign workers. Many other volunteers (e.g. VSO’s) also tend to take a greater interest in language and culture than other foreign workers.* (Ethan UNV2)

Many felt that as a volunteer you were received with patience and goodwill:

*As a volunteer, people have a lot of patience for you because they know you are there out of goodwill. It makes things easier, as people don’t perceive you are taking jobs, profiteering, etc.* (Susan AV19)

The motivation and lack of power also meant that as a volunteer you offered your help but you could not expect that it would always be accepted:

*When working as a volunteer, you must have a different attitude and remember you are offering to help but this may or may not be accepted. So patience and tolerance are important.* (Stephen AV14)

In addition, there was a sense that the experience was not just about helping. The volunteer’s motivation and expectations could be different, emphasising other achievements like relationships not just physical achievements:

*If I don’t achieve anything during my time here, except for some excellent relationships, I’ll be happy.* (Lyn YAD1)

**Flexibility in work and Terms of Reference**

Over 35% of volunteers felt a key characteristic of their volunteer role was the flexibility in their work and Terms of Reference (TOR). There was a clear sense that volunteers did not equate their role with a simple post description or job task as
explained earlier in the way the IVCO framed the role. Volunteers expressed how they liked to be clear on their work focus, or frequently clearer than it was! They were also cognisant this was not easy to define because of the broader vision and ethos that shaped it through the IVCO philosophical approach. They needed to be responsive and accountable to the changing needs and reality of the local host and also to the changing internal and external conditions.

One volunteer painted the broader vision of her volunteer focus:

*Volunteers are a different creature to other technical assistance personnel. They are less about the job at hand and more concerned and preoccupied with the vision.* (Dora YAD3)

This broader vision provided more flexibility to “go with the flow” or respond to the evolving local agenda of those they were working with, beyond specific or more limited targets:

*It has taken a lot of ‘show by doing’ effort by me to prove to my work mates that I am here to work with them rather than with my own agenda, and what they do I do too. So if they are taking an hour to eat fruit, I am too. Perhaps I can get the trust of my work mates more easily, and from this I feel people approach me differently and are more open with what work they are doing (thus I can work more closely with people). Not being so target driven, I can be more flexible.* (Jane YAD5)

Volunteers’ flexibility and integration at a local level allowed them to gain greater trust which could then allow them to have more influence for change in the organisation. However this sometimes meant doing different tasks from what they expected or fitting different roles than were initially planned:

*It’s important to integrate as by integrating you have the greatest potential for obtaining trust and effecting change within the organisation. Being in an organisation for +/- 2 years you do tend to work as an employee and usually are fully involved in strategic planning etc., achieving (and often setting!) goals and objectives etc.. It is also often necessary to be flexible and do other tasks in order to actually carry out your role, quite frequently the infrastructure, systems, funding etc. are not in place in order for you to achieve your own objectives.* (Grace SK1B)
This broader role resulting from flexible TOR had negatives and positives for volunteers in the sense that they felt they could contribute to capacity development but at times felt this was at the expense of really applying their deepest knowledge or expertise:

*Most of the technical assistance volunteers provide is learned in a high school or in our normal working practices. Planning, meeting organizing, computer use, reporting, participatory decision making, are not skills one can hire a technical expert to do. The disadvantage is that we attempt to share our knowledge with our colleagues, not do the job ourselves, so often the job does not get done. Often we spend so much time teaching this type of basic knowledge that we do not have opportunity to implement our real expertise.* (Marleen VSO1)

Despite the drawbacks the capacity development role is crucial in Cambodia as CDRI (2002) research explained: “Government tends to ask TA ‘experts’ to do the job (write letters, speeches, reports, laws, advise the minister) rather than to develop capacity to do the job” (Godfrey, et al., p. 361).

However when ‘flexibility’ in volunteer TOR’s became lack of direction, it had obvious drawbacks. For some volunteers, perhaps particularly young ones with less life experience of ups and downs, the result was a lack of motivation. They found it hard to keep doing the work in the hope of gradual change especially when there were periods of time without clear direction, resulting in boredom:

*Unfortunately this is the down fall of my position. I have had a severe lack of direction/ influence in how my work should be carried out and what needs to be done. For the most part, I have been left to flail on my own, which then results in a lack of motivation. I have had some contact with a local ecotourism professional and he has probably been the most responsible for helping me with my work. He has been important in explaining the Sri Lankan ecotourism industry to me and getting me involved in workshops/ conferences which have given me some direction. Without his assistance, I would have been lost.* (Lyn YAD1)

In contrast a confident volunteer would use this ‘free time’ to advantage for building relationships and consolidating a local language:

*The project couldn’t afford to keep expert staff here for that long. Also as my official workload is pretty light, I’ve had time to study a lot of Chinese*
and build relationships here that a paid expert might not have time to do.
(Les YAD4)

**Respect for volunteer status**

More than 35% of volunteers surveyed mentioned respect for volunteer status as important though there was a mixture of receiving positive and negative respect. The way they expressed the respect they received as volunteers was a very interesting window into issues of status and being able to work closely with local people to achieve development goals. Volunteers felt their host organisations generally had more respect for their status as volunteers than other stakeholders. Outside (and at times from some inside their host organisation) volunteers sensed a low regard for volunteers on the basis of stereotypes that volunteers ‘can not obtain proper jobs’ and the like. The low status attributed to volunteers could make their work more difficult, particularly when trying to gain outside recognition and support. However there was a common theme among volunteers that this varied depending on the contact, prior experience, or understanding outsiders had. On the positive side, volunteers’ apparent low status could improve the rapport they had with local work colleagues and communities. This provided opportunities for really hearing and grasping local concerns and issues (and responding collaboratively to them) in a way that those treated with more status or respect rarely received.

One volunteer described how volunteer work could be stereotyped and undervalued but that personal understanding and contact could alter that:

> In some cases I have found that technical assistance provided by Volunteers is undervalued because it is performed on a volunteer basis; however I think that this is partly due to a lack of knowledge of the skills that volunteers may have and the jobs that they fulfil. It was my experience that people who have a more personal understanding of the range of things that volunteers do or a desire to understand what volunteers do had a more positive opinion of the role of volunteers. (Jenny AVI RV2)
Another volunteer described feeling a lack of respect in the eyes of paid experts, partly because volunteers were seen as without the backing of a large well resourced external organisation or project:

_There is a feeling that as you’re not paid you’re not really qualified to have a say or valid opinion….The AVI has less credibility in many cases in the eyes of “paid experts”. This can make being heard and gaining support for the AVIs project harder. As an AVI, it is also harder to access funds for projects compared with aid workers in larger organizations. This is because AVIs are generally stand alone placements as compared with other aid workers who do their work through their aid organization._ (Patrick AVI1)

The interesting flipside to this was the personal rapport that could be created within local organisations despite being an outside volunteer with ambiguous status:

_Working status does not equate to being a volunteer. …I was taken on as a technical support to prepare and deliver the environmental vision for Gaborone but was asked to fill in when the EO was fired. I had conversations with the project officers as we would socialise and they would say tell me of “things that you don’t discuss with your boss ” and yet they would tell me, partly I think because I have an egalitarian approach to management and so they didn’t feel threatened and partly because I wasn’t “one of them” and therefore it was ok._ (Grace SK1B)

**Strength of relationships**

More than 35% of sources mentioned relationships as being important. Relationships with local people were highlighted by volunteers as important, often in relation to spending time with people over extended periods and as a way of building trust and understanding. These elements have also been identified as an important foundation for achieving work together not simply as valid goals in themselves though they are celebrated by the volunteers as that also. Volunteers also expressed the importance of understanding the importance of the relationship networks of local people as central to their work together.

As one volunteer said:

_As AVIs are in the field and work hand in hand with the local staff or community directly, they can see first hand how strategies are implemented and if programs are working to plan. …The real result is the relationships_
with locals and their community that AVIs establish that most other forms of aid staff can’t achieve. (Patrick AVI1)

Despite volunteer status queries, as discussed earlier, the practical benefits of the on the ground volunteer role were seen as helping cultivate relationships and respect at a deeper, more meaningful level that encouraged cooperative work not just formal respect:

"Working as an everyday member of staff builds close relationships and respect from peers. I believe that through building up a sense of trust, people are more likely to share information and want to work cooperatively. I think people are more willing to listen and take new ideas on board when working with someone they trust." (Ben YAD2)

**Collaborative work**

Collaborative work was regarded as a characteristic by over 30% of volunteers surveyed. Collaboration might be divided into two areas firstly internal collaboration: (providing a foundation for external collaboration) which in some ways merged with the local accountability and ‘working alongside’ that was already discussed, and secondly, external collaboration with communities and other external players more distant or even overseas.

This was expressed simply as being part of the local team:

"We go into organizations with the intention of being part of the existing team, to work with them and learn from them as much as help them." (Anne AVI3)

Within local organisations, volunteer status encouraged collaboration as local people shared honestly without feeling volunteers required so much respect that real issues could not be broached or tackled:

"The liaison role was a very different experience to a plain project staff role, with an entirely different set of expectations from the Indonesian side in particular. It was clear that there had never been an outlet like mine available to the project staff. Official liaison personnel in Jakarta representing the Australian Research Centre do not have affiliations with individual projects and were essentially at too high a position to be useful"
as a sounding board for Indonesian project staff. My unique position as a volunteer is not only liaison at a project level but also not too high to be exempt from conveying criticisms. (Judy AVI6)

Collaboration of volunteers often extended through and beyond the bounds of the institutions they work for directly into more distant communities they worked with. One volunteer talked about how his volunteer work within a natural resource institute encouraged distant community linking with the organisations work:

*These communities are often remote and ... have had no way to voice their approval or disapproval of development projects (such as mines, petrochemical plants, dams) in their communities. Our research and interaction with local communities have enabled them to have greater knowledge about the local resource exploitation projects. Our results also give them a platform on which to mount an argument against these projects.* (James AVI10)

Providing a bridging or liaison role between different players was rare and special in the development sector. Volunteers were able at times to encourage collaboration beyond individual players or projects because of their generally broader more flexible work focus as mentioned earlier. The collaborative focus explicitly favoured intercultural skills over normally narrower institutional criteria:

*International aid in my field typically involves teams of scientists undertaking either collaborative or semi (pseudo) collaborative research as project staff in the target country. Doing this work as an Australian Volunteer rather than as usual project staff had advantages in that I could prioritise activities aimed at strengthening the collaboration rather than just the activities of my single employer (project scientists are always representative of one collaborator rather than the collaboration as a whole). I had previously found that intercultural skills and language were not highly prioritised in project scientists working on international collaborations in my field, as collaborators appoint staff themselves using their usual criteria rather than in a collaborative capacity.* (Judy AVI6)

For some volunteers, the collaboration made a difference in country but also continued in a practical way after they returned home:

*I think to some extent I had an influence in terms of different approaches to heritage conservation. The Thai government has since invested a huge amount of money in training and upgrading its planning system. This has included sending large groups of Thai town planners to Australia to witness...*
Volunteering for an extended period

Thirty percent of those surveyed regarded their work over an extended period as especially important. The importance volunteers attributed to being in country for an extended period, has already demonstrated itself in prior sections. Volunteers mentioned this in relation to other factors ranging from building trust and understanding to living under local conditions and the merged work-social context that facilitated. Also highlighted was the connection between being there for longer periods and the time that allowed for adjusting to local accountability, work methods and pace rather than imposing change.

For example more time allowed stronger local relationships to develop:

*The single most valuable facet of my placement is that I am placed for a relatively long period at a local level. This helps greatly to establish relationships upon which we can get some work done.* (Kieran VSO2)

Volunteers also had a better opportunity to understand the local cultural context over an extended period:

*I think the fact that volunteers are in-country for periods of months to years means that they have a far better understanding of local culture and lifestyle than other short-term ‘international experts.’* (Ben YAD2)

And finally, being present for longer allowed time to ‘see things fall into place’ and respond appropriately:

*I only came to this conclusion after being there for 6-7 months and realizing exactly what was going on.* (Isabella YAD6)

Local ownership

Finally, over 20% mentioned local ownership as unique. A number of international volunteers specifically noted the importance of gaining local ownership for successful development work instead of imposing directions that local people or leaders had not
initiated themselves. Many did this in general terms while some gave specific examples of how they did this in their work. Recognition of ownership was then explained in terms of volunteers’ practical work settings not just in terms of how they did their work but also implicitly by their very location within local structures:

Local people’s interest in, involvement in and ownership of programs is very important. Local institutions need to be capable of fulfilling a project’s goals – one of our research stations is very well managed and our group of on-farm research farmers there are going quite well. (Les YAD4)

Gaining local ownership could be a tension between responding to local concerns about the ‘monitoring’ role of foreigners; a desire to “push” to get things done; and creating an environment where local staff asked for input they needed:

I feel I am pushing rather than assisting my work mates, whom at times I feel think I am here just to check up on them. Proving that I am here to work for them, and not for myself has been important to me, and reaching a position where my fellow workers (there are around 70 Khmer staff working at the research institute) come to me is one of the greatest achievements. Encouraging ownership and in a way empowering through encouragement and demonstrating perhaps alternate methods has also been a big part of my work. (Jane YAD5)

Facilitating ownership was also about respecting local knowledge as well as stepping in sensitively where there was a need to complement or correct this:

Our Department of Fisheries staff are very knowledgeable on technical fisheries issues and in this regard I tend not to contradict their opinions. In some cases where a decision is patently wrong, I need to slowly work on changing opinions and transfer the final decision to my superior so that he retains ownership of it and does not lose face. This is a very time consuming and trying process particularly coming from a European background where a decision can be openly questioned, discussed and argued between several members of an organisation before it is agreed. (Kieran VSO2)

**Summary**

From those surveyed, the following 16 elements, that often overlapped, emerged as key characteristics of their volunteer role in the development sector. Volunteers felt being locally accountable was a key characteristic of their volunteer role. Commonly this was
through integration in local organisations to the point many described themselves as employees with the resulting opportunities, difficulties and compromises this involved.

The ethos, preparation and support of an International Volunteer Cooperation Organisation that facilitated the volunteer assignment was regarded as important for providing a framework for the work and partnership with the local organisation. Appreciation of cultural aspects was seen as important for personal learning, showing and gaining respect, and responding appropriately to local preferences. Personal aspects were regarded as valid components of the volunteer profile in terms of personal learning as well as bringing one's individual personality into the working relationship and network connections. Deep learning not just transferring knowledge or “doing” was noted as an important ingredient for successful volunteer endeavours. Living and working under local conditions and the work/social mix that this allowed was regarded as central to the role of a volunteer. This physical proximity and shared experience was acknowledged as cultivating positive social relations and an understanding of local realities including resource limitations. Building and showing trust and understanding was noted as a significant characteristic that helped facilitate effective relationships and working together. However volunteers also recognised their limitations as outsiders and acknowledged the corresponding reliance on local colleagues for local wisdom and community trust. Contributing to capacity development in line with the local needs was considered a high priority by volunteers, but at times this meant more specific or higher level outcomes were not achieved. This was particularly a result of the fact that volunteers felt they worked at a pace that was in keeping with local people, processes and procedures. Limited power and resources at their disposal to create unilateral change was another characteristic of the volunteer role. This meant being responsive,
and at times compromising broader objectives in order to accommodate local contextual factors like political considerations or priorities local people were motivated to work on.

Being motivated for volunteer work beyond financial remuneration was considered important, for example to moderate expectations of immediate achievements in favour of cultivating longer term positive local relationships and trust that would bring more gradual benefits. Flexibility in work and terms of reference as well as an ability to work across different levels in an organisation were noted as significant characteristics though the down side of this was potential frustration, boredom or misunderstanding because of this breadth. Relationships were considered important to a meaningful volunteer experience and successful work. Collaborative work was categorised as significant both within local organisations and through a liaison role to different outside links and support. Being present for an extended period was felt to be fundamental for gaining trust and understanding as well as achieving effective work. Contributing to local ownership of work rather than imposing outside demands was reflected as important for the role in the comments of many volunteers. This was supported by the formal local accountability of volunteers as highlighted earlier.

The volunteers’ elicited an understanding of how, despite its problems technical cooperation could be improved through greater emphasis on capacity development principles and a relational approach to development demonstrated by international volunteers. These principles encouraged for example local ownership, building on local initiative and knowledge and working at a local pace.
The next section considers volunteers’ perspectives on how effective these international volunteer characteristics are for contributing to development, by changing both volunteers’ and local people’s thinking and practice.

**Is it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers and/or other local stakeholders, as a result of the work together?**

International volunteers commonly mentioned ten areas in regard to achieving changes in their own or other’s thinking and practice. In order of the number of those highlighting them, these were:

- achieving a fuller local understanding;
- appreciating better the complexity and difficulty of working for development and sustainability;
- influencing local understanding; appreciating in a new way the importance of capacity building;
- altered appreciation of flexibility and timing; increased recognition of community;
- realisation of what volunteers are not able to achieve;
- better local understanding achieved because of volunteer status;
- work level as a volunteer;
- and achieving change because of volunteer status.

These areas were mentioned by over 45% at the peak or over 20% of volunteers at the lower end.

**Better local understanding**

Over 45% of those surveyed said their local understanding had changed because of the volunteer experience. Many volunteers related the changes in understanding to a new appreciation of what development and sustainable development meant in practice.
through their experience with local people and institutions in the South. This local understanding was highlighted through references to different cultural learnings and the practical application this had for appropriate work that had local ownership. Despite this heightened local understanding, most volunteers expressed the view that they still recognised many gaps in understanding. They also expressed admiration and respect for the way local people and institutions dealt with the complexity and difficulty of achieving sustainable development on the ground.

As a result, the importance of gaining local ownership for a locally developed sustainability agenda was recognised as crucial:

Volunteer experience gave me the understanding of how important it is to allow local communities to organize their sustainability agenda themselves. They are the ones with the local knowledge and expertise and thus know-how of how to plan for their community. (Isabella YAD6)

Volunteers hence saw the complexity of the diverse factors influencing sustainability:

As a direct result of my experience in promoting environmental management in a development context, I believe that I have developed a greater appreciation of factors that can affect the achievement of sustainability as well as an understanding that sustainability issues are complex and not easily solved. (Jenny AVI RV2)

With the volunteers’ appreciation of local complexity and barriers also came inspiration and respect for local people. One volunteer commented on:

Improved understanding of the difficulties, struggles and endeavour of grassroots people. (Stephen AVI4)

Another said similarly:

I am constantly inspired by the enthusiasm of many people at my work place (especially young people) in spite of difficult conditions and relatively small reward for their effort and little recognition of environmental studies in their country. (Ben YAD2)

Ben said as a result:
I have learned to appreciate the more important things in life, which are not material goods, but instead friendships, love and real experiences. (Ben YAD2)

Another said:

My understanding of the realities of sustainable development has increased significantly during my time as a development worker. I have seen first hand the things which local communities can do and how much they can achieve, given appropriate support. (Alexander SK4)

**Appreciation of complexity/difficulty**

As a result of their experience more than 40% of volunteers said they had a new appreciation of the complexity and difficulty of the issues. Reflecting well the comments of many respondents, one volunteer talked about the broad nature of sustainable development, which made it hard to know how to achieve it through the specific work he contributed to. At another level however he said this led to the suggestion that the broad solution was the synergy achieved by the ‘sum of many small parts’:

In terms of sustainable development on a broader level, being involved in this project has demonstrated to me what a broad concept sustainable development is. We focus on a few agricultural techniques, which could really help farmers in the region. However, the farmers face the entire situation – the area’s agricultural, social and economic conditions. Our research and methods address only a small part of their concerns. How to “achieve” sustainable development? I have no idea. I guess it’s the sum of many small parts. (Les YAD4)

One volunteer acknowledged how she had been forced to realise that transfer of ideas or solutions was not easy and required first appreciating the systems that already existed:

I naively first thought you could come in and set up a program and aside from teaching the importance and how it is done, leave and understand that the work will continue. But the reality is that there are ways and systems that are already in place, and you must learn these and encourage understanding of alternate methods that may be more effective. (Jane YAD5)

This provides a bridge to deeper understanding of the barriers to sustainable development:
Having experienced life as a development worker, I would say that the experience provides a far deeper understanding of the obstacles to sustainable development in your particular host country. (Yameni SK2)

Another volunteer expressed how her work for sustainability was part of a complex slow process affected by attitudes, social and political factors. Hence the importance of slow, sensitive work to respect the local culture. This volunteer also recognised how that had affected her own work style on return to Australia:

As a direct result of my experience in promoting environmental management in a development context, I believe that I have developed a greater appreciation of factors that can affect the achievement of sustainability as well as an understanding that sustainability issues are complex and not easily solved. Attitudes, social structures and political factors play a very strong part in determining the success or otherwise of a development project and changing attitudes, social structures and political factors is a very complex and slow process that must be done in a sensitive manner to ensure that they are fully understood and that the positive aspects of a culture are preserved. On my return to Australia I have found that this experience has made me more sensitive to social and political factors. (Jenny AVI RV2)

**Influenced local understanding**

Over 35% of volunteers surveyed felt they had influenced local understanding through their work. Many volunteers specifically recognised existing valid local knowledge but commented on their role in connecting this existing knowledge or building on this in various ways as Kevin and Kieran explain:

I think I have helped to build their understanding of the issues related to climate change, but their understanding was pretty good already. If anything, I have helped to highlight the linkages between different aspects of the climate change issue. (Kevin AV18)

I don’t think my advice or my presence has changed the view of most resource users that fishery resources are coming under more pressure. The resource users are best placed to judge this. However, I have found that there is little in the way of lateral thinking or exposure to alternative ways of earning a living. It is essentially an education issue and a major part of my work is informal education on transferring pressure from the primary resource. (Kieran VSO2)
New appreciation of capacity building importance

Over 30% of volunteers felt they had a new appreciation of the importance of capacity building through their volunteer experience. I offer a specific example that typified best practice in volunteer approaches to capacity building. The volunteer said he learned the technical and cost side of the work were only half of the required solution, as training, commitment and follow through were also key:

*I learnt that technical design and optimal costs are only 50% of the equation. Appropriate training of locals and engineers, ongoing services (do not fit and forget!) for maintenance and financial management, promotion of income generating activities, supportive and flexible national policy and generally commitment to the point of insanity are crucial for sustainable development and an escape from poverty to occur.... Locally a report this year shows communities are replacing lamps with efficient lamps not bulbs, as they understood the reasons why they had to use them. ...Other foreign workers saw projects from start to end—I would initiate them, then let the local NGO do most of the fieldwork, so I wasn’t the ‘hero.’* (Chris AVI RV1)

One volunteer spoke of his respect for the knowledge of local staff he worked with and the rare need to challenge them. He spoke of the gentle way he worked on persuading people of different perspectives when this occasionally was necessary and the importance of getting his manager on side to do this (Kieran VSO2).

Changes in appreciation of flexibility and timing

Over 25% said their appreciation of the importance of flexibility/time had changed. In talking about being guided by local managers, one volunteer also notes the importance of not trying to hurry the work:

*I need their input and value their contributions as I want to help them change practice, etc. without causing offence or trying to do too much too quickly.* (Anne AVI3)

Another talked about the importance of devoting time to doing basic tasks as a way of gaining credibility and greater work opportunities over time:

*It is also important to do some early hack work and get some runs on the board – this allows one more scope and credibility as times passes.* (Glen AVI2)
This required flexibility:

*It’s important to be flexible and do what is required rather than stick solely to your line of work.* (Grace SK1)

It took time for volunteers to settle in and find their niche in a local organisational context as they engaged with local staff and IVCO local representative:

*I only came to this conclusion after being there for 6-7 months and realizing exactly what was going on. I identified where I thought the gaps were mainly through talking to relevant people. I then ran my idea by them and gauged their response and proceeded on that path. I would also refer to the in-country manager for guidance on cultural issues.* (Isabella YAD6)

**New recognition of the importance of community**

Over 20% said they had a new recognition of the importance of relationships and organisation in communities as a foundation for change. Ruth and Marleen explain:

*I have changed my perspective....small is beautiful as the saying goes and I am in favour of ’do it yourself’ sustainable development – I really believe that change does not require 100s or 1000s of people to start something, that one or two people can start to make a difference, change requires partnerships, building a relationships and listening to people, all interactions can play a part in building the foundations for change. Sorry if it sounds like a cliché, but I now feel more empowered to make changes myself.* (Ruth AVI RV4)

*One thing I learned in Cambodia is the need for a strong community, which thinks beyond the immediate family. Strong communities are able to organize themselves for any type of activity that is of common interest.* (Marleen VSO1)

**What volunteers cannot achieve**

Over 45% of volunteers identified development initiatives or outcomes that were difficult for them to achieve as volunteers that other aid workers would achieve more easily. Beyond “making big money”, which one volunteer noted with a sense of humour, there were three main areas mentioned here as being out of a volunteer’s scope to change: first, having a policy or institutional reform impact; second, providing significant physical outputs or financial incentives; and third, achieving management level change.
Physical outputs are more difficult to achieve. Other forms of aid are geared to ensuring ‘boxes are ticked’ so tend to be more short-term result orientated. (Stephen AVI4)

Obviously, large scale emergency responses are better placed with international organizations. Perhaps influencing ministers on complying with international conventions is another area that they would have more influence in, although even here there is a two way flow of information that DW’s can influence from a lower level. (Chris AVI RV1)

Many of the problems we face in our work can only be surmounted with effective lobbying of government – whilst we work hard on this, it is likely that international agencies/governments with more political clout could be more successful here. (Alexander SK4)

The above mentioned constraints demonstrate a genuinely honest reflection of volunteers’ sense of powerless. It is however also to be read in the context of other comments that clearly demonstrate the opportunities volunteers have because of their ability to complement other initiatives in crucial ways. In this way they could achieve some other subtle but important contributions (e.g. “getting things done because of volunteer status”, and “complementary role for volunteers and other aid forms”).

**Enhanced local understanding from volunteer status**

However while the above discussion makes clear what volunteers identified as difficult for them to achieve, this is balanced to some extent by the fact that over 35% of volunteers expressed their feeling that enhanced local understanding was possible specifically because of their volunteer status. This narrows down the earlier point about not just changing local understanding but that this could be seen as not in spite of but because of their volunteer role. Jane reflected this when she said:

*By being visible for such a long time, and people seeing you adapt to their way of life (food, language, customs etc.), I feel strengthens understandings, and perhaps even on a diplomatic level can be used as a tool to smooth or enhance national relationships. I definitely think you have more of a responsibility in the way you carry out your life and work here, as perhaps your impact is more long-term. The flip side to this is that what you do should be more effective and targeted as you should be more aware of the reality of the situation.* (Jane YAD5)
The volunteers’ status could enhance local understanding but also had a parallel sense of limitations in addressing local needs because of lack of resources and power that local people might also experience:

*I think that volunteers get a very grassroots understanding of issues, and although they may not always have the power, time or the resources to facilitate the development of programs to address those issues, they do gain very deep insight into the nature of those issues.* (Jenny AVI RV2)

Another volunteer suggested that because of his good relationship with locals his view was taken more seriously and he compared this with the potentially flawed work of those who did not have close local relationships and understanding:

*Because of the longer term of my relationship with my counterpart staff and the communities we work with, there is a perception that my recommendations are more practically founded and more realistic. Often we see ill informed recommendations and activities, which are patently inappropriate or unachievable, proposed by short term international consultants who do not understand the cultural identity and socio-economic status of the community. A recent example is the use of a highly technical survey form in advanced English by Khmer local government staff in rural communities. Neither the staff nor the communities can read or write at this level of English and the information collected was badly flawed. This survey was designed by short term international consultants and no thought was given to translation.* (Kieran VSO2)

**Work level as volunteer**

Meanwhile 30% felt that their varied work level was also a direct result of their volunteer status. This could mean volunteers were low in local hierarchies but this was not always the case and often the reality was volunteers seemed to work at a range of levels and yet be commonly seen non-stereotypically in each of them. This varied work level also had advantages despite the apparent ambiguity and expected disadvantages.

Volunteers felt they became part of the ‘inner workings’:

*As a volunteer, you’re given real access to the inner workings of an organization. You become trusted very easily and become one of the team as opposed to being an outsider or a consultant.* (Dora YAD3)
Because of their position in organisations they were not only part of the inner workings they were also considered approachable around day to day issues:

In an Indonesian context, the volunteer with the right education and experience has a unique advantage to not be considered too high in position to interact with. The experts sent out are treated extremely well, but often never hear the true voice of the [local] collaborator during the visit. (Judy AV16)

Volunteers sensed they were seen by local organisations as something they could use toward their own ends. One volunteer said he felt they were:

More flexible (locally based, still green and in lower hierarchical positions) and easier to use for local organizations. (Peter SK3)

While in some ways volunteers might be seen as operating at such a low level they could not influence broader approaches or policy responses, they could cultivate interest and feedback from this level:

Perhaps influencing ministers on complying with international conventions is another area that they [international organizations] would have more influence in, although even here there is a two way flow of information that DW’s can influence from a lower level. (Yameni SK2)

Having influence from lower levels may have led to some perception and/or reality of an ambiguous role for one UNV:

I work 100% as a member of a national institution which is rare amongst UNVs. Of course I work in close cooperation with UNDP. Sometimes this creates some misunderstanding and even friction in my daily work, as the Ministry considers me being part of the UNDP system and UNDP considers me as Ministry staff. ... Usually technical advisers are working on short-term consultancy contracts with very detailed terms of reference (and high salary). As this is not my case, sometimes it is difficult for Government to understand my role and to take full benefit of my capacity. (Rita UNV1)

Another volunteer described her close work with counterparts who regarded volunteers as people rather than organisational representatives, regardless of their organisational level:

The knowledge of real issues in the field is not possible for international workers spending most of their time in their offices, and arriving to villages in their big cars, big entourage and air of self-importance. They are probably more effective in policy-changes, but they need the kind of
information volunteers bring from working in the field. Also, volunteers get closer to their counterparts, even when they are high level, and appear as persons, not representatives of organizations, so the exchange can be more honest and direct. (Marleen VSO1)

**Getting things done because of volunteer status**

Over 20% (7) also felt that their volunteer status gave them unique opportunities to get things done as was indicated in previous sections.

The hands on nature of the work at a grassroots level made a realistic appraisal of change possible, particularly via local relationships as Patrick said earlier (Patrick AVI1). Also local needs were better understood:

*The things you get to understand as a volunteer are all cultural – you know what to say when, how to get something done, what gets respect and what doesn’t. Depending on the work this can be crucial for carrying out work appropriate to the needs of the community and this is the thing that official aid falls down in time and time again.* (Martin AVI RV3)

However local conditions and accountability had their down sides in facing constraints development practitioners at other levels would not have to:

*I don’t think official technical experts and consultants would put up with the difficulties that are unnecessary and imposed by local administrators.* (Anthony UNV4)

Volunteers also provided a presence and accompaniment with local people that provided a bridge between local colleagues and other people and opportunities for making headway together:

*Our counterparts and supervisors are very busy and have lots of other projects and research interests. With us being here, even though between busy periods (e.g. sowing, harvest seasons) we don’t do a lot, it keeps the project on the back burner, rather than it being off the stove altogether. Then when busy times do come, or other project participants from Australia come over, it’s much easier to get things done than I imagine it would be if we weren’t here.* (Les YAD4)
**Summary**

To summarise, individually the volunteers felt it was difficult or impossible as a volunteer to have a policy or institutional reform impact, to create significant physical outputs, provide financial incentives or achieve management level change. Despite this, volunteers felt they had influenced local understanding and made some achievements specifically because of their volunteer status and characteristics. For example, their flexible terms of reference and their work level within the ‘inner workings’ of local organisations gave a particularly strong opportunity to complement existing knowledge and practice. Volunteers acknowledged, however, that this would be difficult to attribute specifically to their presence. Volunteers themselves developed a better and more grounded understanding of local realities and an appreciation of the complexity/difficulty of achieving sustainable development. Volunteers recognised the importance of local direction, support and knowledge for making difficult decisions. They acquired a new appreciation for the importance of capacity development beyond specific technical achievements and had a greater sense of flexibility and appreciation for sensitive timing and the importance of community.

**Volunteer recognition in the development sector**

International volunteers raised two major and related concerns about their recognition within the development sector. Interestingly the clear perception that volunteers’ contribution was not always positively acknowledged (by 25% of volunteers) was overshadowed by the solid appreciation that there were great synergies to be achieved by collaborative work between volunteers and other stakeholders with different roles, resources and focus in the development arena. This was expressed by over 35% of volunteers.
Mixed respect for volunteers in the aid sector

Over 25% of volunteers felt they were not well respected by official players in the aid sector although many described their experience as a mixed reception. For one respondent, while volunteers might be characterised as singularly positive, there was a clear perception that at times volunteers were not well regarded at all:

Volunteers seem to be passionate, caring, earth-loving folk. I guess the potential disadvantage is that you’re not taken seriously and you’re easily mistaken for an intern, drop-out or someone who is just passing through while taking a ‘career break.’ (Dora YAD3)

Another volunteer working in a UN agency felt the same rights did not apply to volunteers as for other UN staff exemplified by considerations like training:

Unfortunately also UN organizations are sometimes treating UNVs as second-class free labour. UN organizations do not want to invest to training or other capacity building of UNVs, like they do for Junior Professional Officers. (Rita UNV1)

A former volunteer reflected on fruitless attempts to get work in the aid industry after the volunteer stint as a reflection of how this was seen:

From my experience since returning, I have found it difficult to obtain further work in the aid industry. Not sure if this is because my previous experience was only as a volunteer or other reasons. (Isabella YAD6)

Another ‘returned volunteer’ lamented that while on assignment the government would listen much more readily to consultants than to him or his colleagues even if the consultants agreed with them:

I felt my status as a volunteer severely limited my credibility with government, who would listen to highly paid consultants and not staff/workers. And the consultants agreed with what we were doing! (Chris AVI RV1)

Volunteers commonly voiced an overall lack of general recognition from the official aid players even though in certain contexts this was more mixed. One complained that volunteers were:

Paid lip service, but in practice we are undermined and our expertise is not acknowledged, even if it is of a higher level than otherwise available by
Volunteers mentioned that technical assistance experts were often better respected although it was appreciated that when aid managers were more deeply engaged with specific outcomes, they were also more open to all contributions towards this, including the volunteers:

*I believe technical staff are generally more highly respected than volunteers by official aid agencies, however in my experience if people are genuinely interested in progressing projects and making a difference, they will respect others for their input regardless of their position and status.* (Ben YAD2)

Other volunteers felt that while there might be technical differences or lack of respect from official technical assistance staff, again donors were more positive seeing the practical implementation and follow-up that volunteers provided on the ground:

*On a local level my contribution is well received and generally supported despite individual disagreements on technical issues. The attitude of some expat staff is arrogant and condescending towards unpaid volunteers and likely relates to a perceived lack of value related to the lack of salary. At the donor level however the attitude is positive and supportive in the main because we are seen to be much closer to the implementation of the donor’s goals on the ground.* (Kieran VSO2)

**Complementary role for volunteers and other aid forms**

In terms of their distinctive contribution there was recognition of the potential complementary role of volunteers with other aid players by more than 35% of volunteers.

There was a common expression that volunteers’ grassroots experience allowed a deep understanding of development problems without necessarily having the resources, time and power to respond adequately to them. There was a feeling that this could have been better harnessed through greater interaction with other government and non government development organisations:
I think that Volunteers get a very grassroots understanding of issues, and although they may not always have the power, time or the resources to facilitate the development of programs to address those issues, they do gain very deep insight into the nature of those issues. I think that with greater interaction between volunteers and government aid agencies and NGOs more could be achieved, as each of these groups has very different areas of strength and they are ultimately trying to achieve the same objectives. (Jenny AVI RV2)

Volunteers that worked with NGOs provide a different perspective from government and donor ones:

The donor and international aid agencies in Lesotho appear to be sectioned off from internal policy formulation on mass and only invited to big meetings where policies have been completed and funding to implement policies is needed by the government. At these meetings donors tend to put over their political mandates, i.e. what they will and will not support financially. Working within the NGO sector however enables engagement on these issues at grassroots level and gives a fuller understanding of the issues at stake. (Yameni SK2)

One volunteer described this succinctly:

I think more cooperation between "international experts" and "international volunteers" would produce better outcomes for everyone, as their areas of expertise would complement each other. (Ben YAD2)

One volunteer, part of the Austraining Youth Ambassadors for Development program (started by AusAID), felt the aid sector viewed positively her volunteer assignment but that she saw her assignment as going beyond this, complementing directly through her relationship building work, the more ‘hard nosed’ output oriented work AusAID staff did. Asked how she was received by other aid players she described herself as part of AusAID:

I am here with AusAID, so I feel I am here more in a building relationship capacity. So that staff here sees visibly AusAID’s involvement, rather than a focussed output orientated capacity. (Jane YAD5)

Volunteers could provide accompaniment and follow through that was not available from short term contract workers or consultants:

Consultants are respected but often foreign workers come on short contracts without the follow through possible from development workers. (Grace SK1)
Volunteers’ grassroots relationships and understanding could provide local continuity to development work and a trusted link point that outsiders could work through:

*Having us here to keep tabs on what is happening on the ground means when more technical, short term experts do come, we can make sure their time is not wasted in details and logistics and can give them a lot of background to the situation easily. We can also introduce our leaders/experts to the locals. We have some personal ties which make everyone more comfortable and allows ideas to be exchanged more freely.* (Les YAD4)

Volunteers acknowledged they had not been in a position to provide financial incentives as part of their work but could provide complementary services when these were provided by others. The volunteer’s contribution increased accountability and sustainability and went beyond narrow project agendas or goals:

*Sometimes organizations need a boost of finance for a particular project which other aid can provide, but Development Workers can ensure accountability, effective reporting and sustainability. It appears to be unusual to provide official technical assistance to NGOs and community based organisations which is the area that Skillshare does achieve results. Much aid is now available only in a project format often with many strings attached or for very restricted agendas.* (Grace SK1)

The volunteers could, in the above example, initiate links and help create bridges between local agencies and donor ones where this would not otherwise exist:

*It appears that international funders like working with international personnel as they understand the ways of working and delivery etc. so the DW may become the link between the organisation and the agency.* (Grace SK1)

One volunteer explained the practical day to day assistance and training he gives through working closely with local staff. He said this meant managers and other people like consultants were better able to take advantage of their more limited time with local staff when they are present:

*The use of computers, daily work plans, programming of activities, listing responsibilities, analysing problems, managing staff have changed because I had a lot of time to show colleagues my working methods, help them with daily problems and discuss my view about the way they work. Consultants and staff from the head office don’t have the time to do this and make use of the improvements that I make with colleagues.* (Peter SK3)
Volunteers also were reliant on other aid players for technical information that assisted their work:

*I relied very heavily on information and materials that were developed by technical personnel working for consultancies and government aid organisations while working in Thailand, so as not to reinvent the wheel. I think that it is important for volunteers to appreciate the positive work being done at many different levels by other technical assistance personnel and to draw on this expertise.*  

(Jenny AVI RV2)

**Summary**

Many volunteers felt they were not well respected by other official aid players though many described their experience as a mixed reception varying with the degree of contact and interest in mutual goals. Volunteers were better respected by the local organisations in which they worked partly because their volunteer status meant they were able to develop good rapport with local colleagues. Despite their mixed reception, volunteers were very clear that their grassroots experience (despite its resource or power limitations) was at times used by and had great potential to further complement other aid initiatives to significant mutual benefit.

**Conclusion**

This chapter inquired whether volunteers, from their own accounts, had fit a niche that responded to the current development dilemmas discussed in Chapter Three. Their own words explained the fragile but potentially fruitful characteristics they have and how these could make a difference even if at times they were also problematic at a personal or organisational level. At times their apparent greatest weaknesses, for example, their recognised lack of power, authority and resources actually showed themselves to be the most potent driving force for quiet but important capacity development. This nurtured local ownership and resourcefulness and built on it rather than impose external routes to predetermined outcomes. Volunteers’ local accountability was at times a source of great personal frustration as they adjusted to local cultural mores and timing but also
enhanced and encouraged local initiative and knowledge. Volunteers also tackled the common development dilemmas of technical assistance like seeking quick tangible results, working in isolation and failing to structure in local accountability to cultivate local ownership. They identified specific examples of how they were locally accountable, at times at significant personal cost but in ways that worked at a local pace in line with the default capacity development principle ‘don’t rush’ (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003). They also were also at times able to provide a bridging and advocacy role for their local host organisations with other development players, using their local knowledge and networks as leverage.

Volunteers demonstrated, in a practical way, a relational approach to development that emphasised relationships and the broad concept and vision of development beyond simply ‘development as practice’. In this sense volunteers learnt themselves, which made their role potentially transformational rather than simply as an instrumental tool to others’ progress.

The next step is to consider whether the other development stakeholders also see the validity of the characteristics and contribution articulated by the IVCOs and discussed by the volunteers themselves. In Chapter Six I explore these connections in fieldwork examples from Cambodia and Central America and provide conclusions on the scope for greater complimentary use of international volunteers alongside other development interventions.
Chapter 6: Stakeholder views of long term international volunteers for development

Introduction
This chapter provides insights from non-volunteer stakeholders about the work of long term international volunteers for development and sustainability. As a precursor basic development indicators are provided for the fieldwork context in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Cambodia. The first section then describes and analyses the main characteristics identified by other development stakeholders as important to the long term international volunteer role. The specific themes discussed are accompaniment; local accountability and ownership; personal aspects; learning; motivation, values and ideas; local conditions and extended period; liaison and bridging; IVCO ethos and support; technical and other support; relationships; mutual benefit and change; capacity development, cross cultural issues; and limited power and resources.

The second section discusses evidence of shifts in the thinking and practice of volunteers and those they work with. The two themes discussed are the way local directions are exercised and joint decision making facilitated and the way volunteers are seen as close to the local reality and hence well placed to respond to local needs.

The third section considers the recognition of international volunteers in the development sector by reviewing the four priority themes in this area identified by other development stakeholders: cultural exchange versus development and impact; complementary and strategic contributions to other forms of development cooperation;

35 These were explicitly not current volunteers but included all other possible development stakeholders, e.g. NGOs, volunteer host organisations, UN or multilateral agencies, government representatives and other observers. This included on three occasions current experienced development practitioners who revealed at interview they had at some time in their life been long term international volunteers. One of those, a senior UN project manager had volunteered in the Melbourne University Volunteer Graduate Program in the 1960’s and another was the head of a regional office of a major European donor who had been a VSO over fifteen years prior.
capacity development contribution; and responding to local needs and seeing local reality.

The chapter uses the stakeholder data gathered to compare their views with that of volunteers themselves. It uses these conclusions to reflect on whether this composite picture of international volunteer characteristics, achievements and recognition fits with the broad development conception advocated in Chapter Three as important current and future directions for the aid and development sector.

This chapter presents information collected in the field through interviews with international volunteers, former international volunteers, donors and international volunteer host organisations, observers and collaborators. These field interviews provide corroborating evidence for volunteers’ perspectives collected by survey. Most importantly they provide a different vantage point to review the work of international volunteers for development because they show the views of donors, volunteer hosts and observers and the similarities and differences found there. Many of the interviews triangulate insights from different stakeholders involved either in Central America’s environmental vulnerability project or Cambodia’s livelihoods and community fisheries sector.

Through NVivo, 114 coded themes were identified and then the most cited ones (21) put into a table and graph (see Appendices Five and Six). Because of the central importance of host organisation views the ranking for this is provided alongside all other stakeholder views as an interesting subset for comparison. I have added the percentage rating by volunteers in the graph as a further comparison between their
views and others. Actual numbers and rankings for themes are also provided in the table in the Appendix Five.

The fieldwork context
The fieldwork in Cambodia and the Central American countries of Nicaragua, Honduras and El Salvador is used to shed light on the research questions related to international volunteers for development in their breadth. It does not make comparisons between countries or regions though this would be interesting to do in further research. As of January 2006 Cambodia was on the development Assistance Committee (DAC) List of official development assistance (ODA) recipients as a Least Developed Country while Nicaragua was classified under Other Low Income Countries (OLIC) because of a per capita gross national income (GNI) of under $825 in 2004 while El Salvador and Honduras were considered lower Middle Income Countries with per capita GNI of $826-$3255 in 2004 (OECD, 2008b, p. 238). Nicaragua and Honduras were also considered Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) (OECD, 2008b, p. 238).

Historically in Central America poor rural campesinos have been pushed by government policy and intensive commercial agriculture onto mountainous marginal lands. As Roberts and Parks (2004) say:

The devastating impact of Hurricane Mitch on Central America, for example was due largely to deforestation of hillsides, as over the years the poor had been forced to farm on unstable uplands because the best coastal land was in the hands of national elites and multinational corporations growing crops for export. It is these poor people who suffer most from the consequences of environmental damage and degradation such as deforestation, water contamination, and soil erosion. In other words poor people are the most vulnerable to the adverse consequences of the stresses that the modern world is placing on the environment. (p. 4)

Progressio’s environmental vulnerability project was an attempt to respond to Central American people’s needs within this broad and long term sustainability framework.
Nicaragua’s Human Development Index (HDI) value was 112 out of 177 countries and its Human Poverty Index (HPI) value was 40 out of 103 countries. The HPI highlights the proportion of people below a threshold level for ‘living a long and healthy life, having access to education and a decent standard of living’. Life expectancy at birth was 70 years (2004) and an adult literacy rate of 76.7% (ages 15 and above) (United Nations Development Programme, 2006a, p. 285).

Honduras’s HDI value was 117 out of 177 countries and its HPI value was 39 out of 103 countries. Life expectancy at birth was 68.1 years (2004) and there was an adult literacy rate of 80% (ages 15 and above). El Salvador’s HDI value was 101 out of 177 countries and its HPI rank is 34 out of 103 countries. Life expectancy at birth was 71.1 years (2003) and there was an adult literacy rate of 80% (ages 15 and above) (United Nations Development Programme, 2006a, pp. 284,285).

Cambodia was ranked 130 out of 177 countries on the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) and the worst performer in East Asia and the Pacific for the UNDPs human poverty index (HPI) ranking 81 of 103 developing countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2005). Life expectancy was 56.5 years (2004) and the adult literacy rate was 73.6% (ages 15 and above) (United Nations Development Programme, 2006a, p. 285).

Around 86 % or 11 million Cambodians live in rural areas and more than 8.5 million people are reliant on agriculture, forest resources and fishing to directly sustain their livelihoods (Sloth, Kim Sreng, & Bottra, 2005, p. 102). As the Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI) concluded:

Success or failure in the management and conservation of natural resources will fundamentally affect the development and stability of society and the
Cambodia’s natural resources play a critical role in rural livelihoods by providing opportunities for households to: diversify their livelihood activities and thereby compensate for the risk of agriculture failures; optimize their labour resources among different activities during different seasons; access an income-generating activity with very little capital investment and no land; maintain and improve nutrition, as many forest and fish products represent a significant source of protein and other nutrients (McKenny and Prom, 2002)....In a survey of nine villages, CDRI noted a relatively higher dependence on natural resources for the poorest households. (Sloth, et al., 2005, p. 112)

As in Central America, in Cambodia natural resource management is deeply affected by history and politics and critical for responding to poverty and achieving sustainability more broadly. The Tonle Sap Lake region is classed as Cambodia’s poorest given 38% of the population living under the poverty line (Sloth, et al., 2005, p. 114). It is also considered the most significant inland wetland in Southeast Asia. It covers 250-300 000 hectares in the dry season and 5-6 times more in the west season (Asian Development Bank, 2005, p. ii). More than 4 million Cambodian people are estimated to derive their primary or secondary income from inland fishing (Sloth, et al., 2005).

**Characteristic features of the role of international volunteers**

This section highlights the themes ranked most highly by non-volunteer stakeholders as key features of the volunteer role. The results make a useful comparison with how volunteers themselves saw their role. Interestingly as is seen from the table and graph of themes in Appendices Five and Six, the broad suite of characteristics are very similar to those identified by the volunteers themselves with some differing levels of priority and emphasis. Seven of the characteristics were actually ranked in the top ten overall most commonly cited themes of the surveys and interviews input to NVivo. There is consideration of the way volunteers ‘accompany’ local people and the way volunteers are locally accountable, thereby enhancing local ownership for their work. Beyond this, there is also a legitimisation of the personal side to the volunteer role. This is reflected by reference to their special motivation or values and the acceptance of a learning
experience for volunteers that allows a mutual rather than just one way benefit that includes an emphasis on appreciating relationships and the cross cultural dimension. These relational elements of a volunteer role are appreciated as worthwhile in themselves but also as tools to enhance the development contribution when found in combination with other common aspects of the volunteer role. These complementary aspects are living under local conditions for an extended period with the parallel resource and power constraints these imply; providing technical and other support which means a particular capacity development opportunity; and encouraging liaison and building bridges between institutions and initiatives.

**Accompaniment**

The highest ranked theme by non volunteer stakeholders is ‘accompaniment’, including the advocacy/solidarity role of volunteers. ‘Accompaniment’—a term encountered more in Spanish (acompañamiento) than English—captures the idea of living and working alongside local people on a constant basis\(^\text{36}\) rather than just providing specific and short term or ad hoc technical input on a one off basis. It was seen as crucial in providing volunteers with a real sense of the local at times tough and complex reality and as a credible entry point for engagement with local people. It was seen as a hands on, *in situ* bridging of the distance between plans and practice or even the superficial nature of some interventions and an important component of capacity development beyond tasks or ‘development as practice’. It also was seen as providing space for advocacy and support to local staff as they adapted to evolving and dynamic contexts. On the negative side it was recognised for its inherent frustrations and complexities as well as potential for paternalism.

36 In the volunteer surveys this was expressed largely as living and working alongside locals under local conditions. Because accompaniment captured this so powerfully in Central America, I adopted this term in the non volunteer stakeholder analysis particularly given it was also explicitly used by observer Leonie (CAMO2 cited under accompaniment section) in Cambodia.
Accompaniment is far from the idea of simply ‘development as practice’ or ‘doing development’ but also far from the idea of simply an exciting adventure that does not analyse and tackle key and complex issues. This is because its focus is on being with local people first rather than just doing things for or with them. Though the ‘doing with’ usually happens as a natural outworking of being with local people and seeing first hand what they experience and struggle with.

Carmen, a Central American host organisation boss, said Sophia, her volunteer, had gained through accompaniment an entry point for sharing her technical skills. The purely technical approach might have been seen as enough to resolve specific issues for the foundation they work with, but that in itself was not sufficient to see it embraced by the broader community without actual constructive engagement with that local community.

Maria, a Central American municipal officer, spoke of how she observed Sophia, the volunteer, had to adapt to the local reality, a genuinely difficult task for the volunteer and local staff.

Sophia comes from Spain,... a different context. ... and she used to suggest such and such and I would tell her you can’t [do that] in this municipality

37 NB I have on purpose inserted the Spanish original quote in the text as a reminder of being conscious of the importance of different cultural contexts in development. For subsequent Spanish quotes I have put the English translation in the text with the original Spanish in the footnote as a more subtle reminder and opportunity for Spanish speakers, including those quoted, to see their own words directly. 38 "Those who live within the communities have the most positive effect... they must always get involved with the communities... if they are too technical there is no way in for that volunteer, ... they see everything as too technical and... very quick, all the consultations or all of the workshops... this will not make for a good experience. Maybe for the Foundation, for its technical response yes... you can get good experiences in that. But... so that the communities really feel... that support, it is not that effective (CA30H).
Sophia ... we have to adapt to what exists. We cannot escape that reality. ...She ... has recognized that there are existing efforts and initiatives, but that there is still a long way to go. She has placed herself in this situation, in this reality. I know that it’s hard right? Because it is hard for me too. As a Honduran, it is hard for me. How is it not going to be hard for her who comes from somewhere else? It is but that’s where the versatility of each professional comes in. (CA570)

Amanda, an Australian donor representative, agreed with host and observer assessments above of the ‘value adding’ of volunteers accompanying local people which put them in a better position to develop positive and close relationships without an underlying resentment about different conditions and rewards.

As a volunteer, they can become closer to their government counterparts than an advisor working in the same organisation because they face the same problems of living from pay to pay and never having quite enough money and they talk about these issues together whereas, the consultants are on a very different lifestyle. So... some people say, “Oh well if you are only a volunteer then maybe you’re not offering as much as this highly paid consultant.” But on the other hand, there may be this: “I can talk to you and I am not resentful of you because you are not driving up in a Land Cruiser everyday. You come on a moto to work, like me. (CAMD1)

Diego, a Central American NGO director, spoke of the deep engagement and commitment of volunteers in his organisation’s work, even to the point that the volunteer had taken photos during their protest march. He compared that with the detached and ‘mechanical’ short visit of an Inter American Bank official followed simply by mail correspondence and said the volunteers, because of their constant interaction, really accompanied processes and by their very nature “got involved”! He says the volunteers began with a humanitarian focus and enthusiasm but by living in the local reality this understanding grew and deepened:

39 “Sofia viene de España,... otro contexto diferente. ... y decía tal cosa y yo le decía no se puede Sofia en este municipio...tenemos que adaptarnos a lo que existe. No podemos salirnos de esa realidad. ...Ella... ha conocido que existen esfuerzos e iniciativas. Pero que hay un gran camino por delante de hacer. se ha ubicado en esta situación, en esta realidad. Sé que es duro verdad? Porque para mi es duro. Como hondureña que soy, para mi es duro. ¿Cómo no va a ser duro para ella que viene de otro lugar? Pero es...ahi es donde entra la versatilidad de cada profesional (CA57O).
...the consultant is part of a machine, the volunteer is more of a humanitarian, the consultant doesn’t get involved, the volunteers by their very nature tend to involve themselves. (CA28H)⁴₀

A Cambodian NGO director noted the importance of accompaniment over simply ‘teaching’ or ‘showing’ for capacity development.

"There are so many people swishing in, so often saying, “you need your capacity built and I’m here to teach you X and Y.” It just is so undermining. There is so little notion of accompaniment and good capacity building practice is much more about accompaniment than a task and that is not a word that gets into many people’s vocabulary." (CAM02)

The female agronomist Claudia who worked directly with Margarita, the volunteer gender specialist in El Salvador, gave a heart felt explanation of how the accompaniment radically altered her own life and professional practice. As a result of the work alongside Margarita, she began to transform her own methodology and practice to make it more participatory and reaped the rewards from the local knowledge and engagement it created.

"When I began to work with Margarita, she taught me how to work with everything to do with gender. The truth is that it changed my whole life. At university they teach you that you know everything and that you need to teach others but now with Margarita, I started to see these other methodologies –she didn’t invent new things but made adjustments. I began to realize and became sensitive to the fact that campesinos [sic]also have capacity. I started to involve them. I didn’t do it anymore instead they did it or we did it together with participatory techniques. I had never done a participatory diagnosis. I asked them questions and they themselves came up with the information. So now with all the methodologies that Margarita taught me, I have changed a lot in my way of working. We did a diagnosis of gender, of gender relationships, and together we did it! With participatory agro-ecological practices, it is different now.

...In the short months with Margarita I learnt a lot because we worked together. ...In other organisations that I have been in I didn’t have the opportunity, well there are always gender specialists, there is a gender focal point in all organisations, but I hadn’t understood it, on the other

⁴₀ El consultor es parte de una maquina el cooperante es mas humanitario el consultor no se involucra el cooperante por su propia naturaleza tiende a involucrarse (CA28H).
hand with Margy she touched my heart and made me sensitive to it and made me change my practice. (CA51HC)41

Glenda, the NGO director who supported an initiative which also had a volunteer (Paul), spoke of his almost family style community links and the way he worked alongside others not just directing them like an orchestra, so in that sense again accompanying processes.

He has also grown, grown together with this group because we always learn from the processes in which we involve ourselves and it has also happened to Paul. As he lives in the area, it is much easier, he knows the campesinos [sic], he knows how the people are in the North, he has really accompanied them, I can honestly tell you he has not merely arrived to lead the orchestra but has involved himself directly in the work. (CA22)42

Gherardo, a Honduran campesino who experienced the agricultural capacity development work of the volunteer in his role with the local rural NGO, captured well the sense of valued work together. He said: “Bayardo comes with technical advice and implements it with us and us with him” (CA32O).

However the informal and potentially almost family like relations, which are part of the nature of accompanyment with NGOs and their work, are different to the potentially

41 “cuando empecé a trabajar con Margarita ya con eso de género me enseno como hacer. La verdad es que me cambio toda mi vida. en la Universidad te ensenan a que vos sabes todo y que le tenes que ensenar a la gente y ya con Beatriz pues empezando a ver estas otras metodologías no se invento pero se hizo adaptaciones. Empecé a convencerme a sensibilizarme que la gente pues tiene capacidad también. empecé hacer trabajo ya con la participación de ellos ya no hacia yo sino que lo hacían ellos o lo hacemos en conjunto, y esto con técnicas participativas y yo nunca había hecho un diagnóstico participativo. Yo les hacía las preguntas y ellas mismas iban llenando toda la información. Entonces ahora con todas las metodologías que me enseño la Margarita, he cambiado bastante en mi forma de trabajar. Hicimos un diagnóstico de género, de relaciones de género, y conjunto!. Con las prácticas agroecológicas ya participativo es diferente. … 
… con Margarita en los pocos meses aprendí mucho. Porque trabajamos en conjunto. … Pero si en otras organizaciones en las que he estado no tuve esa oportunidad, bueno siempre hay especialistas en género, hay un área de género en toda organización, pero yo no lo había captado, en cambio con Margarita si llego a mi Corazón y me sensibilizo y me hizo cambiar (CA51HC).

42 “El ha crecido también, creciendo juntos con esa mesa porque siempre aprendemos de los procesos en que nos involucramos y a Paul? le ha pasado eso también y como vive en la zona, es mas fácil, el conoce a los campesinos, el conoce como es la gente del norte, realmente ha dado un acompañamiento de verdad te puedo decir porque no es meramente llegar a dirigir la orquestra sino que meterse a trabajar (CA22).
more challenging relationships and experiences of volunteers in government departments.

The value of working within government with local colleagues was expressed by Chea, the volunteers’ Cambodian Fisheries manager. He appreciated the extra support of the VSOs because of the informal and formal capacity development work they did in his newly created community fisheries office.

_We need a lot of human resources, a lot of capacity, and support... we are very new, ...so the role of VSO is a very important one, ...step by step not directly like that, but they try to show how to transfer ideas, knowledge, it’s not easy, ... you teach in school, ... but you cannot teach behavior, people do not change behavior through school, its through experience, through modelling day to day change. That’s why it needs volunteers day to day working closely with the local people, so local people can learn directly from their actual activity and then maybe a little bit can change... but to conduct a training to change is impossible._

_...Important is the need to communicate very closely, official or unofficial ... that’s why we need somebody very active in open, friendly, talk to people. That can make the transfer effective, talking, even unofficial talking, everyday they have to closely participate in all activities. (CAMH8)_

Tomás, the Honduran NGO manager, explained that he thought like any assistance, the benefits of having a volunteer work with local people can present the problem of paternalism. However, because of the local accompaniment, he felt that a volunteer was more likely to experience and respond to the local reality ‘with others’ rather than ‘for them’. He says this was because the reality had been lived and responded to in a way that an intervention from outside could be seen as providing a ‘magical’ solution from a different context.

_...I don’t consider that the problem of paternalism is a volunteer problem that other forms of development cooperation don’t have. I don’t think it is that... I believe more that one of the ways to get out of that situation is by_
being there, living it for a while ... the exclusion and marginalisation of the people. (CA290)43

Local accountability and ownership

Just as local accountability came out as a top ranked theme among volunteers in Chapter Five, it came out as the third most cited theme from other stakeholders, demonstrating its importance for all stakeholders. This is one of the most distinctive features of the role within the development sector as is noted by host organisations and donors. It also highlights the opportunity for volunteers to work within host country government agencies as well as the possibility of a more horizontal form of cooperation where local organisations have significant control and can even dismiss volunteers they find unsuitable.

As one Central American NGO host said very straight-forwardly, they did not have their own funds to pay for a volunteer and could not divert other project funds to this. However, if they were offered a volunteer who could fill an area that they could not already cover, they welcomed a volunteer who could contribute there and allow an interchange. However, he said if the volunteer imposed him/herself instead of collaborating with the organisation for its environmental ends and the communities the organisation works with, he/she would be told to return home straight away (CA28H).

In this sense local accountability for volunteers allows not just the right for host organisations to seek an account but also the power to impose sanctions (Cavill & Sohail, 2007; Leat, 1996).

43 No considero que el problema del paternalismo sea un problema de cooperantes y que la otra cooperación no la tenga. Yo no piensa que sea eso...Yo más bien creo que uno de las formas de sacarse de esa situación es estando allá viviendo un poco...la exclusión y marginalidad de esta gente (CA29O).
One Cambodian host organisation noted that they dismissed a volunteer who did not diplomatically handle work related problems, showing this really can happen if the host is unsatisfied (CAMH4).

Jim, an Oxfam Country Manager in Cambodia, explained the difference he had seen in the accountability of local staff Oxfam employed compared to international volunteers who had been employed directly by the local organisations not Oxfam. Oxfam already provided technical support, he says, but the people doing this were not employed by the local organisation and this was the distinction he drew out as most important.

We fund ...program officers, Cambodian program officers who will support, talk through problems, give advice, work together on planning, do some training or help to identify training needs that get sourced elsewhere. But we felt like it would probably be really helpful to have some volunteers in there who are placed full time and who are employed by the organisations themselves rather than by Oxfam. (CAMO4)

John, an IVCO staffer, explained the accountability of the VSO volunteers and how VSO did not play a managing role but instead a bridging role through the volunteers across a sector but without significant control – quite a unique, opportune and novel, if difficult, position. This process priority is one clear strategy for responding to the Paris Principles like ownership and mutual accountability that so many donors struggle with.

It is very difficult for us to have a sense of a programme because we are working in so many different organisations and we are working in a lot of different projects so we don’t actually have our own project. It is a very different way of working and it is therefore quite difficult to be focussed. I think a project can really come in and have a lot more focus, potentially a lot more impact, but ... I think the approach of VSO..., working within existing structures, with government and civil society, and, strengthening those, country structures, has got to be the right way to go long term. (CAMI1)

**Personal aspects**

The importance of personal aspects was the third most cited theme in the volunteer survey and it received 4th highest ranking from non-volunteer stakeholders also. Non-volunteer stakeholders recognised the diverse personalities reflected in volunteers.
Volunteer hosts recognised the importance of this ‘soft side’ for example informal interaction and discussion, combining with the technical side for greatest development benefit. This emphasis on the personal links to Ellerman’s (2005) indirect approach as well as the relational and subjective dimensions of a wellbeing approach (McGregor & Sumner, 2009; Sumner & Tiwari, 2009) were discussed in Chapter Three. Personal change was also noted along with professional development in both volunteers and host work colleagues. A former IVCO CEO said volunteering for development was fundamentally about personal change first and then broader change. One former volunteer’s personal reflection showed how in some ways this was the hardest side of his assignment in a way that he had not expected.

Volunteers, like all development workers, brought with them their own particular personalities and human sensibilities that affected the work. Some stakeholders suggested this was important regardless of being a volunteer or not. Tomás, the NGO observer, suggested the interaction of personalities (and perhaps underlying this also culture) is part of the learning by volunteers and their counterparts as they show the different ways they see the world.

*Sometimes, the personalities themselves can affect the job, it’s from that starting point that they learn, the volunteer and their local counterpart.*

...[the volunteers] were gaining local experience, getting to know the people, by seeing the life of the campesinos with our [Southern] organisations, a different way of seeing life. I think that is one of the most important things particularly because the ways of working and organizing are different for the campesinos. (CA290)

There was a sense that focusing on the personal and other elements was important as an indirect way to get things done when adjusting to the different world views of various

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44 “Algunas veces las personalidades mismas afectan el trabajo, es desde allí donde se aprenden tanta la contraparte como el cooperante….se iban llenando de la experiencia nacional, del conocimiento de la gente de otra forma de ver la vida los campesinos con los organizaciones nuestros. Eso creo que es uno de las cosas más importantes y además que las formas organizativas nuestras de trabajo de las campesinos y campesinas son diferente” (CA290).
players as Tomás outlined earlier. It could be extremely personally challenging as well as an opportunity to develop and demonstrate personal agency when local direction was not so clear. As a former international volunteer still working in Cambodia reflects:

*I think to a large extent I thought it was hopeless. But also I ... really lost a lot of self-esteem working day after day in an office on my own. I was starting to think, “I’ve really failed here. And it is hard in ways that I didn’t expect it to be hard. I had a very simplistic view of how it was going to be ... it was more personally challenging than the environment. The biggest one would be self motivation, and I’ve certainly improved my ability to do that...and I think a real awareness of ethics and you know sort of personal integrity and those sort of things, once it has come under challenge. I’m a lot more aware of that, especially in a professional capacity in the work I do. I’ll do a small research paper or something very innocuous, even a lengthy email to a colleague and that will be quoted a number of times in other people’s research and just start to realise that wow, what you say, really carries weight, in a way that I don’t think I’d ever have that position in Australia.* (CAMRV2)

As the above former volunteer explained, the assignment challenged him in ways he could not imagine while also strengthening his personal agency as a result. A volunteer host said volunteer assignments can destroy people if they don’t have the right placement or if they aren’t able to find enough personal confidence, tenacity and initiative to get through it in the way that Nicole also described earlier.

*Bad placement can destroy people who might have the potential and then ...they have been placed badly and that means that they haven’t got a real function in their placement. ... and if they haven’t got the sort of maturity to be able to extract themselves from it, it can destroy them.... people with a bit of initiative might find their own way and take some initiative and find their own place in the placement and work through it and get something out of it.* (CAMH2)

In other words a volunteer assignment can be destructive. International volunteering does put the volunteer in a vulnerable position and so there are inevitably varying levels of personal cost as a result. This is why the IVCO framework and backup is crucial. However when it is particularly personally challenging, it can force volunteers to deepen inner strength, resolve and personal agency. The result of a successful volunteer assignment can also be personal and professional transformation for a volunteer’s local counterpart as expressed below by Claudia.
As I told you I didn’t know anything about gender, so I was the first one to change my way of seeing myself. So Margarita helped me on a personal level as much as on a professional level, a lot,…I haven’t had the opportunity to work as closely with other foreigners, but we did work well together—sharing professional skills and on the personal side and that has been a really rich experience. (CA51HC)

A UNDP manager lamented the narrow technical focus of his two volunteers who he said were very narrow in their expertise and not sufficiently holistically oriented for the broad pro poor and integrated work he does. He emphasised the importance of soft skills for the work he did in sustainable livelihoods. With the increasingly pressure for a technical focus on many IVCOs, he felt there was a danger that they may lose sight of their roots in a more holistic approach (CAMH3).

Another volunteer host staff member Sok said the UN agency representative valued their volunteer Silja’s combination of knowledge and interpersonal skills emphasising the equal importance of each.

The Representative very much appreciates Silja’s experience, her knowledge and her interpersonal skills, she is the kind of person who could be entrusted with many different activities. (CAMH6)

Learning

There appears to be a fundamental tension between development and cultural exchange in volunteering. This fundamentally questions whether development is a two way process or not and whether it is just ‘development as practice’ or something more. Learning is fundamental to international volunteering but is it fundamental to development? I have provided evidence in Chapter Three for supporting the affirmative; the question is whether the non volunteer stakeholders interviewed in the field felt the same way. One donor representative I quote later draws a clear distinction

45 “como te digo yo no sabía nada de género, asi que yo fui la primera. En cambiar en mi autoestima también. O sea que Margarita me ayudo tanto a nivel personal como a nivel profesional, Bastante bastante….no he tenido oportunidad de trabajar de cerca con otro persona extranjera, pero si nos combinamos allí tanto en compartir técnicas profesionales como en lo personal y ha sido muy rico eso” (CA51HC).
between volunteers learning and doing development. A range of other stakeholders seem more comfortable with the idea of mutual learning as long as it is also linked with useful practice not just one way learning by the volunteers.

We might compare this broad and common, if more subtly addressed dichotomy, with the comment of Leonie the UNDP project manager in Cambodia who pinpointed the common lack of an interactive adult learning philosophy in capacity development projects as the most obvious cause of their lack of impact.

*For ten years in Cambodia, 33 million dollars had been spent on so-called capacity building and the conclusion was that it had little impact...It is not done based on a needs assessment, it is done on the base of what a donor wants to ‘do’. And ...very often not based on an interactive, adult learning philosophy, therefore no respect or interest in what the learner already brings to the learning situation.* (CAMO1)

This raised the issue of what development work requires: just ‘doing development’ or something more, as suggested by Chapter Three’s relational approach to development with elements like capacity development, civic science and indirect approaches.

This suggests there is room for mutual learning as a Honduran campesino Gerardo claimed about the benefits of interacting with an international volunteer.

*It’s a benefit... for the organised farmers groups like ours. Because we learn a lot from them and they learn a lot from us also because ... sometimes they don’t understand how and why we do things. Nor do we know what they know.* (CA32O)

Michael, an in-country volunteer host and FAO project manager, said development requires learning by all players and also provides reciprocal benefit to them all and should be acknowledged as such, not just in a volunteering context. He also hinted at the importance of recognising and building on Cambodia’s ancient and proud history.

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46 "Es un beneficio… tanto para la institución como para los grupos que estamos organizados. Porque aprendemos mucho de ellos y ellos aprenden mucho de nosotros también porque…a veces en lo que uno hace ellos no lo saben. Ni nosotros no sabemos lo que ellos saben (CA32O)."
demonstrating the adult learning philosophy lamented by Leonie as often missing. This could be seen as contributing to social learning as discussed in Chapter Three, including individuals and institutions but also more broadly whole domains.

If development activities are really operating well, that scent or the impact of development should suffuse all aspects and all people involved with the project so that even people like myself who is in a fairly senior position, should be learning all the time as we go along. Should be enriched by the experience, just as we expect that our government partners will be enriched, the village beneficiary communities are also developed and be enriched. Otherwise there is a lack of holism and what I consider to be inappropriate prejudice with respect to who is really benefiting from development. We all benefit…. So, Cambodia, in a sense, could be considered a young country, although one certainly with an ancient past but waking up from a melee of recent history and redeveloping, regenerating, relearning. (CAMH4)

Maria, a Honduran municipal tourism officer who had contact with volunteer Sofía, explained the importance of volunteers like Sofia not just learning about the local reality for their work in country but also as a way of analysing the real causes of poverty and seeking profound change to respond to these, on return to their country of origin, rather than simply placing a bandaid in situ. She felt volunteers must come with this vision of work for change – to see that the volunteering is part of a bigger and broader contribution to development. Maria said the volunteer experience:

has allowed them to visualise other realities. In their countries they have made greater progress. They can visualise that historical and cultural processes determined those advances. And that is what has immersed our Latin American countries in the situation in which we are….The volunteers … apart from being in an organisation where they can develop their work, must also come with a clear vision on what they will do once they have returned home from here… Now knowing this reality, what more can be done to really tackle the main problems (not just to patch it up) and with clearer and more profound visions…about where we can tackle the problem. (CA570)47

47 Les ha permitido a ellos visualizar otras realidades. Donde en sus países ellos tienen mayor avance. Y pueden ellos visualizar que procesos históricos culturales determinaron esos avances. Y que es lo que tiene sumergido a nuestros países de América Latina en la situación que estamos. …Los cooperantes… aparte de estar en una organización donde puedan desarrollar su trabajo, también deben de venir con una visión clara de que hacer una vez de que ya estuvieron. …Al conocer esta realidad que más se puede hacer que ataque realmente el problema medular. No que parchemos. Y con visiones más claras y más profundas…donde podemos atacar el problema (CA570).
Similarly a volunteer government host in Cambodia said how important he thought it was for his volunteer Natalie to develop an understanding directly from the reality of his country through interaction rather than just via the media at home.

*You get very selective information through the media that normally has their own objective in Australia and this is not the whole image of the country so when you are here, you interact with people, you experience first hand what happened to the country, I am sure they get a better understanding about the country.* (CAMH5)

Central American NGO director Glenda said volunteers have to learn from the knowledge of local people not just expect to teach, otherwise there can be conflicts because of questions of authority and power and hence the need for volunteers to expect to help and learn.

*It should be seen as a requirement for volunteers that they also come expecting to learn. He or she will learn about the reality and wisdom that the people of the countryside have. If they come only with the mentality that they’re going to teach, I believe conflicts can arise of authority or of power relations, I think that they have to come with an open mind, I know more, I am going to help but I am going to learn too.* (CA22)

Tomás, Central American NGO director, said if volunteers integrated well with a local organisation, they would bring new ideas and teach but also learn a lot and gain a lot from the experience. Because of that he said it was one of the best forms of development cooperation because there was a more ‘just relation’ than with more financially or project based development cooperation (CA29O).

Meanwhile former volunteer Mark reflected on the way the volunteer experience changed his understanding of poverty and the development sector and made him appreciate the issues in Cambodia as well as Australia. He said it also empowered him with a new sense of personal agency and what is really important to achieve.

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48 Se le debería de solicitar como un requisito a los cooperantes de venir porque también va a aprender, el o ella pues van a aprender de la realidad y la sabiduría que tiene la gente del campo, si viene solo con la mente que va a enseñar allí puede surgir conflictos creo yo, de autoridad, o sea de relaciones de poder para hablar mas si, yo creo que tiene que venir ‘open mind’ yo se mas yo voy a ayudar pero yo voy a aprender pues (CA22).
I feel that we have a really simplistic paradigm of poverty in the West. Since being here I have realized that it is a much more complex thing that people in abject poverty aren’t necessarily unhappy or pathetic or needing or wanting help… As a Westerner, I used to have the impression that we had this position in the world where we could help these people. I am starting to realize it is not that simple and I guess that patronizing view in the West, ‘Aren’t we lucky here. Look over there. These people are a mess.’ And I think to a certain extent they are but now I look back to Australia and think, ‘Wow.’ You know, ‘those poor Australians.’ The way things are… I really feel like now I have got the power to choose where I want to go and be comfortable with it whereas before I don’t think I was really in charge, I don’t think I was aware of all the options or the reasons I was doing things. Working for two years on a fixed low salary, I quickly realized that…it is a hoax that the whole rat race game, especially in Sydney of the wages you need to earn and the things you need to buy.

(CAMRV2)

Motivation, values, and ideas

There was an observation from local hosts and observers/donors that volunteers bring a strong motivation and interest to the host country and a sense of urgency and different vision to the issues they worked on. It was suggested that the volunteer model provided a contrasting, positive, altruistic model to the commonly, more pragmatic donor model. Equally, an Australian donor suggested that the Australian volunteers provided a positive image of Australia’s genuine interest and concern. One project manager said the volunteers brought a welcome boost to the battle weary long term development practitioners. There was also a feeling of affirmation from local organisations and people of foreigners who fitted in with their culture and language. Similarly, there was a sense of relief felt by a volunteer who received recognition for what she had done when offered a contract by an international organisation to continue supporting a local government department in the same way that she had as a volunteer. This also exemplified the difficult sense of achievement volunteers felt because of their broad roles with often limited tangible outcomes and the lack of feedback from IVCOs because this was seen as the local host’s role.

NGO director Glenda said volunteers could get people moving faster than their usual
pace and that could help get things done more quickly.

Another positive aspect is that here, sometimes for a number of reasons, maybe part of our culture, we are slower to do tasks, actions, our planning, so then the volunteer can add a bit more firewood to the flame, as we say, because time matters. He/she knows that time matters so that contributes to the activities of the project not falling behind as much. (CA22)⁴⁹

Beyond a different tempo though, Central American NGO host Ricardo Navarro said volunteers bring an important and different vision that can complement and challenge local perspectives.

The participation of the volunteers brings us a distinct and important vision. (CA56H)⁵₀

Reflecting on the abundance of financially/politically driven donors and projects in Cambodia, Leonie, a UNDP project manager, suggested the altruistic angle of international volunteering is a welcome contrasting model (CAMO1). As Leonie suggested, volunteers do not fit the traditional aid model and lack recognition as an inevitable result of this. This is acknowledged by Julia at the Australian embassy. She saw the passion and impatience for change of the volunteers, as well as the image of Australia they portray as a result.

The individuals are very well regarded within their province or the district where they are working [but]...as a mass they are not recognized for the role they play, and I think that it is important...they do go into difficult situations and get on with it, they get really passionate about what they are doing even though some are a bit frustrated by not being able to do as much as they want to do (CAMO5).

UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Agnes recognised the motivation and skills of international volunteers which brought a sense of urgency to important issues, despite how they were, at times, looked down at in the development sector.

⁴⁹ Otra parte muy positiva es que a veces aquí por sinnúmero de razones, tal vez propio de nuestra cultura, somos un poco más lentos para hacer las tareas, las acciones, nuestra planificación entonces eso el cooperante ponga un poco más de candela, como decimos verdad, porque el tiempo vale, el sabe que el tiempo vale entonces eso contribuye también a que las actividades del proyecto no se atrasan tanto (CA22).

⁵₀ La participación de los cooperantes nos trae otra visión distinta e importante (CA56H).
In most cases, the volunteers are much more motivated than the people who out there have their nice salaries coming every month. They have chosen that path because they had already an inner motivation and that really transpires and channels in the way that they address the work that they do. There is a sense of urgency; there is a real sense of commitment. There is a sense of wanting to achieve something, of really engaging their counterpart. (CAMD2)

A long term development professional in commercial aid projects appreciated the lift enthusiastic volunteers brought to the more hardened development professionals, while they mentored the volunteers with a dose of realism (CAMH2).

FAO project manager Michael said volunteers linked to his project are respected for their contribution and highlighted the affirmation local people felt in villages when a foreign volunteer came speaking their language. He made a distinction between the stereotype of young volunteers and the volunteer professionals VSO has recruited to link with his project.

In comparing the term volunteer to consultant, expert, specialist, it could be considered to be a kind of inferior role. But...amongst the Cambodian staff working with the Department of Fisheries in the provinces, their perception is much more pragmatic. If a person demonstrates their ability to be effective, then they are highly respected as an effective contributor to the project. In the case of the selection of the volunteers working with this project, VSO is due credit for having been selective and having chosen people who really are quite capable and are not what you would call young volunteers but instead are volunteer professionals. (CAMH4)

One UNESCO UNV supervisor suggested their volunteer was very resilient and dedicated with a different ‘concept’ to regular staff ‘on a job’ (CAMH7).

David, a project manager and volunteer supervisor, suggested that his volunteer was motivated, experienced, qualified and hard working and only lacking international development experience. He saw his volunteers’ primary motivation as getting into the field with a willingness to suffer hardship and basic conditions as a step in the path to a career in development (CAMH9).
Local conditions and extended periods

Volunteers work under local conditions for extended conditions. This is considered an important part of the volunteer niche in development not just by the volunteers, as discussed in Chapter Five but also by other stakeholders. This and the work/social mix that it cultivated was seen by a range of stakeholders as an important characteristic.

As Carmen, Honduran NGO director and volunteer host supervisor, said some of the greatest benefits come from volunteers like Sophia who live in the communities where they are working hence making strong links and relations there (CA30H).

Maria, who worked in the same municipality, agreed on the community recognition of the valuable ongoing day to day experience that complements the formal work and the acceptance the community has shown by letting Sophia stay in one of their houses, by working with her and trusting her.

They live within the community. They have the day to day relationships as well as the working relationships that develop. So ... there is greater ease in doing things, more time to develop not only a working relationship, but a close relationship ... That allows them, not only to know what is appropriate to do, up to what point they can achieve it, but also to know more about the culture and be able to support people a little more. ... For me, the fact that local people allow them to sleep in their community, in one of their homes, demonstrates that. The second is that the people work with the volunteer and believe them, that is a second demonstration of the strength of the relationship. (CA570)\(^1\)

Ricardo Navarro said it was important that volunteers lived under roughly similar conditions to those they worked with. He said the pay of volunteers had to be similar though he understood there might be an extra allowance for the additional costs.

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\(^1\) Ellos viven dentro de la comunidad. La relación de día a día además del trabajo que desarrolla. Entonces ... hay un mayor relajamiento para hacer las cosas, mayor tiempo para poder hacer una relación no solamente de trabajo, si no una relación más estrecha ... Que le permita pues no solamente conocer lo que hacen, hasta donde pueden lograrlo, sino saber más de su cultura y poderlos apoyar un poco más. ... Para mí el hecho que permitan que duerman en la misma comunidad, en una casa de ellos, es un gran reconocimiento. La segundo es que trabajen con ellos y les crean, eso es un segundo reconocimiento (CA570).
foreigners face (CA56H). This also fitted in with the Paris Declaration and the agreement from the 3rd High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2008 that Australia and other donor and developing countries signed to strengthen and work through partner country’s own institutions and systems (Australian National Audit Office, 2009; OECD, 2008c).

Volunteer Natalie’s Cambodian government supervisor, Preap, acknowledged the cultural and physical resource constraints many volunteers face in cash strapped ministries, though noted that in his department with support from a project, they had better conditions than the norm. He said he appreciated the challenges that placed on the volunteers (CAMH5).

Violetta, the Honduran NGO director and volunteer host, reflected on the problem of a volunteer living intensively under the same circumstances as her local organisation and thus getting engulfed in the problems rather than responding objectively to them.

Someone who places themselves within an organisation full time should know how to differentiate themselves. Their contribution is more intense because it establishes more communication and I think that is appropriate…. However there is criticism about this type of cooperation because a lot of the time they can get so immersed in the local problems they can’t objectively give their assistance. (CA53H)52

Violetta also noted the different ways of working of two different IVCOs CIIR and MS that both had responded to her requests for volunteers. She noted for example the different conditions they provide for their volunteers and the impact on trust or effectiveness that had – she said it brought the volunteer closer to the local reality when they arrived by bus or on foot and separated them more when there was provision of a vehicle for example.

52 Alguien que se ubica dentro de una organización como a tiempo completo creo que debe saber cómo diferenciar y su aporte claro es más intenso porque también establece mas comunicación y creo que es el adecuado…sin embargo hay criticas de estas tipos de cooperación porque muchos veces puede absorber la misma problemática y no ser muy objetivo al dar su aporte esta persona (CA53H).
**Liaison and bridging**

As has been discussed in other sections the broad and complementary role of volunteers provides different opportunities to other development actors who specifically have their own project or initiative beyond that of the priorities of their local host. It meant volunteers had more opportunity for bridging and networking across and between other programs’ projects and organisations to encourage greater synergy. This approach fits well with the trans-national civil society roles discussed in Chapter Three (L. D. Brown & Timmer, 2006).

Natalie explained how as a volunteer in Cambodia she was frequently used as a link person to people and processes guiding people who were coming in from outside who did not work day to day with the country and the government department and were unsure of many important practicalities (CAMRV1).

In Central America, Ricardo Navarro contrasted the important role of projects that needed funds with the equally important role that international volunteers played in establishing ‘human connections’ (CA56H).

Also in Central America, Claudia explained how volunteer gender specialist Margarita with whom she worked took up the cause of a group of women who had missed out on receiving donor funding. They had wanted training and assistance, even though they did not fit technically within the geographic area that was covered by their NGO work. Margarita had lobbied on their behalf to the donor and when that was not successful, made an effort to include them in the work she was doing—hence improving their skills for their own direct lobbying on future occasions (CA51HC).
Tomás also pointed to the ongoing relations that local people and organisations like his had with former volunteers now back home, giving them links to organisations and information along with the opportunity for honest and open discussions about them (CA29O).

Violetta, the Honduran NGO director, commented on her experiences of CIIR and MS volunteers that have brought technical capacity development as well as linkages to relevant experiences and organisations in their different home contexts of England and Scotland as well as similar Southern contexts like Nicaragua (CA53H).

**The ethos and support of International Volunteer Cooperation Organisations (IVCOs)**

While IVCO preparation and support did not get as high a ranking from stakeholder interviews as from volunteer surveys, it was still clearly articulated as one of the important characteristics of international volunteers. It was exemplified by comments about the useful and yet unobtrusive ethos, preparation and support provided by IVCOs to volunteers. There was a clear differentiation that was at times made on the basis of a nuanced understanding of the different sorts of IVCOs and the volunteers they offered or the conditions they came under.

An NGO host reflected the important framework an IVCO could provide when combined with a deeply felt local need and request:

_Where most you find successes is when an organisation has sat down, really thought about it and then matched that with a voluntary organisation that also has the good screening and matching and orientation programme. Some organisations have really good language programmes and give them time to assimilate. I am pretty pro international volunteers within well managed, or organisations that are clear what they want and are actually doing the work._ (CAMO3)
This has already been mentioned on various occasions in this chapter in terms of how close to local conditions people may live and this depends on the level of IVCO allowances and this also has ramifications for perception of ‘volunteers’. For example, whether volunteers travel to ‘their’ communities in a car or walking/on the bus. Equally pertinent is the age focus of different programs. Some stakeholders for example compared volunteers with significant experience, maturity and realism to those with youthful zeal and enthusiasm. This was noted by one observer as the ‘competitive’ Australian Youth Ambassadors Program for young ‘high flyers’ vs the ‘mission’ perception of AVI volunteers as experienced mid/late career people ‘wanting to give something back’. Value was attributed to the different programs in different ways and for different settings and they may occupy different places on the ‘development as practice’ to broader development continuum.

**Technical and other support**

The notion that volunteers are characterised partly by their provision of technical and other support links to the debate over development vs. cross cultural experience. The fact that non volunteer stakeholders recognised the strong technical credentials of long term international volunteers shows to some extent recognition of their serious development credentials beyond simple cross cultural forays for international understanding. The stereotypical idea of some people was still that an international volunteer was someone with little skill or experience but great enthusiasm and dedication. As the chapter on IVCOs explained, this stereotype is no longer characteristic of long term international volunteers and probably in some cases was never really correct. This section feeds into recognition in the development sector over the last 20 years that technical forms of development cooperation alone were insufficient (Morgan, 2002; OECD, 2009c). This has been brought into even sharper focus over the last ten years with the new focus on capacity development (as discussed
in Chapter Three). If volunteers were historically seen as keen but unqualified (‘only a volunteer’), they were certainly not just seen as keen any more. The question that might be asked of some IVCOs is how they managed to retain enough of the relational side of the volunteer ethos to accompany the renewed emphasis on qualifications, technical proficiency and outcomes. This tension between relational aspects, technical skills and outcomes has led to claims that volunteers were now simply seen as cheap technical assistance.

Brian, the European donor livelihoods specialist, compared favourably the highly skilled VSO volunteers that work in the Cambodian Fisheries department now with the old ‘generalist volunteer’. He said even if the current volunteers’ qualifications were not directly fisheries related, they were requested for the skills they bring. This is unlike what he saw as the old VSO style of an organisation only being able to request a ‘generic’ volunteer without specific skills needed for the task at hand. This, he thought, left the volunteer and requesting local organisation frustrated. This idea might be seen as related, though a little different to the suggestion of the Australian donor official that for her the Australian Youth Ambassadors were totally focussed from the start on a very specific post they wanted to apply for compared to the AVI volunteers who she felt were equally qualified and probably more experienced but signed up first and foremost for the volunteer experience (for example ‘live, work and learn’).

Tomás, the Central American NGO director, emphasised that being well qualified as a volunteer was one thing but quite another was the relationships with people or relating to people in the best possible way (CA29O). Salvadoran NGO director Violetta said the volunteers had to be able to translate and adapt their technical skills to the local
situation – in other words for the context and orientation of the local organisation and where and with whom they were working.

The contribution of the volunteers is important ...but ... while the language issues can be overcome, in rural areas the person needs to have the capacity to adapt themselves. Of course we also have to adapt ourselves but volunteers have to appreciate the context of the reality in which they will be working, because if they don’t have it, this limits them ...because they can’t make a practical contribution that is useful development cooperation. A volunteer doesn’t just have to provide technical skills but leave a lasting and broader type of support. (CA53H)\(^3\)

Daniel, Project manager, said technical skills and field craft that can adapt to the local context, history and culture were essential for an effective career as a development practitioner. Otherwise, he said, all the technical skills were inappropriate. He saw the pragmatic and essential nature of this combination of skill, practical flexibility and contextual understanding for the specific outcomes his project had achieved. In that sense he demonstrated that, at the furthest end of the continuum from cross cultural experience, at the most hard nosed technical assistance end, there was recognition of the importance of the relational approach (CAMH2). Preap, the Cambodian government manager, discussed the importance of relevant technical skills but also the way they were conveyed, passed on and embedded by Natalie the volunteer, through capacity development and institutional strengthening that imbibes a vision for the future – the more relational elements.

Language, technical skills, even cultural exchange ... all are important but I think technical, I would give higher rating ...Natalie has worked with us as a climate change and energy advisor so she has helped us implement some technical and institutional capacity building activities, provided backstopping support and advice to the staff, in particular in establishing an institution in charge of CDM project. A CDM project under the Kyoto Protocol and projects that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and have the country achieve sustainable development like the renewable energy

\(^3\) El aporte de los cooperantes es importante...pero...en las áreas rural también la persona tiene que traer, el lenguaje se supera, lo que si se tiene que tener esa persona es la capacidad adaptarse, por supuesto que nosotros también verdad de adaptarnos pero tener el contexto de la realidad en la cual va a trabajar, porque si no lo tiene, creo que eso le limita... porque no logra como aterrizar con a una práctica que tiene que hacer, y como una cooperación real. Un cooperante no tiene que dar solo una técnica sino también tiene que quedar otro tipo de aporte (CA53H).
projects, re-afforestation projects, she has provided all the technical and advisory support to us in doing that… I never feel that we make enough use of her. Probably we under-use her but still I think by working with her we have made a lot of good progress in capacity, technical capacity building, institutional strengthening in the field of climate change and a forward looking aspect also. (CAMH5)

**Relationships**

“There's Mr Jose Ramos…whom I've known for a long time. He's a good friend. An excellent person, very amiable” (CA320)\(^5^4\).

This quote from campesino Bayardo demonstrated the strong bond and friendship that is characteristic of many volunteer ‘work’ interactions. As was discussed in Chapters One and Three, a relational approach to development is important but often relegated in importance to the fringe of a project or an instrumental tool for the implementation of a development intervention rather than being seen as part of development itself. There was general acceptance of the principle but limitation in its actual implementation, for example in many initial project meetings as NGO director Vanessa explained.

Relationship building is central to effective development work as interviews in Cambodia and Central America made clear. Volunteers can be characterised by the importance of relationships in their work. This is evidenced by the friendship and camaraderie mentioned by community and institutional observers. Even donor organisations recognised that for volunteers a simple job description alone is not clear without its embrace and evolution in dialogue with local organisation managers and in the light of local culture, people and environments.

Jim, the Oxfam manager, said he has seen successful volunteers as the ones able to make a practical difference while seeing how important relationship building was first to gain trust followed by sharing skills.

\(^{54}\) Ahí esta don José Ramos que…que el ya lo conozco desde hace largo tiempo. Él es un buen amigo. Excelente persona, bien amable (CA32O).
My experience has been that the success or failure of a volunteer placement boils down usually to the relationship that the volunteer is able to strike up with the employer... the chemistry between the people. And you can have a great volunteer with all the right skills, but if they are not able to strike up a relationship with their employer then....the skills don’t get transferred, you don’t establish that trust and it doesn’t work out. The volunteers that I have met are very much focused on achieving something that they think will be useful. But they recognise that in order to do that you must work at the relationships. (CAMO4)

Maria, the Honduran municipal officer, reminded us of the cultural importance of relationships that had to be acknowledged and prioritised for successful development work in her Latin American society.

Remember that we are a society where relationships are key in these Latin American countries. Relationships are indispensable and the communication and...the contact... maybe in Europe I suspect this is different. (CA570)

**Mutual benefit and change**

The idea of international volunteering as one characterised by interchange, mutual benefit and personal change is common in the recognised and oft expounded ethos of international volunteering discussed in Chapter Four and Devereux (2008a) but it is actually also more commonly expounded today in development discourse (Chambers, et al., 2001; Eyben, 2006; Groves & Hinton, 2004; Kaplan & United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service, 1999). However, it is also recognised as important by many development practitioners such as the FAO project manager Michael who earlier explained the importance of all development players learning. Tim from ACIAR also reflected on how international volunteering was good for their projects but more importantly provided overall positive synergies that concur with the views of IVCO field workers like Rob.

The volunteers that I have visited there has been real evidence of great camaraderie and, good working relationships. So, everybody is learning.

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55 Recuerde que estamos una sociedad a relaciones en estos países de Latino América. Las relaciones son imprescindibles. tal vez en Europa no hay esa situación y uno lo puede percibir. Y la comunicación y… el contacto (CA570).
And everybody is improving there, everybody is developing. There is a combination that they contribute through their skills and education and work. They learn a lot as well. So there is a lot of organisational, project, personal, cultural and government benefits out of the exercise. (AUS01)

A Cambodian government official also recognised that the volunteer he has worked with gained obvious benefit from the experience and local knowledge whist also passing on valuable skills. Central American NGO director Diego also appreciated the exchange with volunteers from the North where they learnt, shared skills and worked closely with the joint aim of improving the environment and community’s conditions.

There is also a cultural exchange, they learn as much as we do about other cultures. If they come to collaborate we welcome them, and working together he will learn and we will learn. We will both collaborate to improve the environment that indispensably includes the community’s conditions. (CA28H)

**Capacity development**

Capacity development work is characteristic of international volunteers, as has already been discussed in terms of the specific value placed on this by non volunteer stakeholders. This role is discussed in this section in terms of the support requested by governments as illustrated by a Cambodian government manager noting the volunteer contribution for their specific operation. It is also highlighted by the IVCO staffer responsible for the same volunteers who explains the important role of the volunteers in supporting the ministry in encouraging a range of stakeholders outside the department to work in with it rather than in isolation much as the bridging role was mentioned earlier.

There is also recognition of the difference between training and capacity development roles. This highlights how volunteers must help facilitate processes rather than just fill gaps, which on its own can create dependency (though is occasionally essential in order to do both). This is illustrated by two views of volunteer work: one from a Salvadoran

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56 Hay un intercambio cultural también, tanto aprenden ellos como nosotros aprendemos de otros culturas. Si vienen a colaborar bienvenido y trabajo juntos el va a aprender nosotros vamos a aprender y ambos va a colaborara por el mejoramiento del ambiente que incluye indispensablemente las condiciones de las comunidades (CA28H).
agronomist Claudia working alongside volunteer Margarita and another from Natalie, a former volunteer. Natalie says her technical prowess was not initially matched by her capacity development skills. She says she clearly had to develop these and as we hear from her, and her supervisor, on various occasions she was eventually highly successful in doing so. However, it took a World Bank offer to have her continue the same work to give her a more explicit sense of recognition for what she had achieved in its most tangible sense.

Claudia recalled her initial complaints when Margarita suggested that she should be facilitating rather than teaching new methods. However, she says she eventually realised that the new participatory processes made her work easier as well as much more effective in gaining local ownership.

_I used to tell Margarita, ‘No Margarita why complicate things, look we’ll do it like this’. ‘No Claudita’ she used to say to me ‘it’s just that they have to do it, their way’. ‘No’ I used to say ‘look at how much time we will lose’ I told her, ‘it’s better that we tell them how to do it all in one go’, and she used to say to me ‘no Claudita they have to do it and we will do it together with them. ...We’ll act as the facilitators. They have to come to their own conclusion and... do their own work. They have to do it drawing on their own experiences’. And sharing with other people was really difficult for me. It cost me a lot, I couldn’t get it in my head how it was possible to do it. And the truth is that seeing it from another point of view, it facilitates the work so it’s much easier. Before I used to get hoarse from speaking so much and the people themselves didn’t understand! Now they do because as a slogan of the ‘campesino a campesino’ program says, an example carries people with it. (CA51HC)\(^{57}\)"

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\(^{57}\)Yo le decía a la Margarita, ‘No Margarita para que nos complicamos, mira lo hagamos así’. ‘No Claudita’ me decía ‘es que tiene que hacerlo ellos, es de ellos’. ‘No’ le decía ‘mira cuanto tiempo vamos a perder’ le dije, mejor de una vez decimos tal tal, y me decía ‘no Claudita es que tiene que hacerlo ellos y lo vamos hacer en conjunto con ellos. …Vamos hacer como facilitadora. Ellos tienen que llegar a la conclusión y… ellos hacer su trabajo. Tiene que ser ellos a través de su experiencia’. Y de compartir con otra gente, por mi fue bien difícil. Me costó mucho, no me entrabá en mi cerebro como fue hacerlo posible. Y la verdad es de que viéndolo desde otro punto de vista se facilitó el trabajo es más fácil. Porque antes hasta me ponía fónica de tanto hablar y la gente quedaba igual! No quedaba sensibilizada en cambio ahora sí porque bueno como dice un slogan del programa campesino a campesino el ejemplo arrastra (CA51HC).
**Cross cultural issues**

The debate about the relationship between development and cross cultural issues is central to discussions about international volunteers. Interestingly volunteers rated highly the importance of cross cultural issues for their role but not the debate over the separation of development work from cross cultural exchange where ‘development as practice’ was seen as the ‘real’ work instead of the broader relational approach to development. Cross cultural issues could be seen as fundamental to broad development work, as Jennifer the European donor in Central America said, giving volunteers cross cultural insights they take home to apply there. Equally at a pragmatic level, it was feasible and understandable for people wanting practical impact, to think that cross cultural issues needed to be bridged to allow the real development to occur. One Southern host organisation posed that this was one advantage of South-South international volunteers that they didn’t require the same degree of cross cultural acclimatisation. In contrast some other hosts said that outside international actors were sometimes more appropriately modelling and advocating sensitive treatment of marginalised people than local professionals did. Accepting that the cross cultural is important for both international understanding and achieving appropriate practical development outcomes or development in its broadest relational sense only highlights the importance of volunteers being encouraged to value the cross cultural and practical development sides. One former volunteer’s reflection about her IVCO cross cultural training highlighted the struggle she faced accepting her own diverse home cultural context as linked to appreciating cross cultural difference overseas.

**Limited power and resources**

A telling theme that emerged from the volunteer survey but was reinforced with slightly lower ranking among other stakeholders was the fact that volunteers are seen as to some extent lacking resources and power to make a significant impact. The nature of this
argument is very interesting as is the appreciation of it from different stakeholders. The issue links to the question of volunteer status as well as to the debate about whether volunteers are serious and skilled development contributors or just ineffectual interlopers in a serious business. An international project manager and volunteer host said volunteers faced difficulty being taken seriously because having no budget meant this could not be used as pressure or conditionality to effect change.

Again you are trying to work within their system. The only flexibility you have, or if you like, influence is probably that you do carry a budget and that is usually something of significance to them so that you can offer that funding with conditionality: “OK. This money is available but, within the context of some change that we are looking for. And we are prepared to fund these things provided the administration and the system and bureaucracy can change to allow for that funding to happen.”......So you can influence because of the resources that you have available....Whereas if you are a volunteer...you can’t get access to money, so you want to do something, you can’t. (CAMH2)

CDRI (2002) research explains this situation of donor ownership of projects in Cambodia:

Usually, it is because they are aiming at efficiency, impact, innovation, experimentation, visibility or control, and they may see a conflict between these aims and conceding ownership to government and thereby developing its capacity. Donors need to be convinced that there is no such conflict or that, where a conflict exists (as with loss of control or visibility) the benefits of a government-owned process outweigh its costs. (Godfrey, et al., p. 371)

In contrast to the donors project manager, a Cambodian government representative, Chea, expressed the resentment local people felt when they were forced to accept donor conditionalities and compared this to the more accessible form of assistance provided by volunteers who do not and cannot impose an agenda from outside. It reminds us why “participation for material incentives” is low on Pretty’s (1995) typology of participation because with minimal attempt to “build local skills, interests and capacity, local people have no stake in maintaining structures or practices once the flow of incentives stops” (pp. 1252,1253).
Chea says the volunteers:

Try to understand the local people and not try to put something and force local people to accept, this is not good, like consultants, national and international they have terms of reference, they have their program and agenda but sometimes it’s very good...but I observe people, probably they can work [more] closely with the VSO than with the consultants because they feel consultant is high, yes high, VSO is people who are very touchable, reachable, people who are accessible ... because when we have consultants few people consult.. and the consultant is mostly with the director but the VSO many people can approach, that is the difference. (CAMH8)

A Central American NGO director highlighted the limitations of relying on money to change things and reflected on the surprisingly positive change achieved by volunteers without money. A local Central American NGO volunteer host equally appreciated the control they have over the volunteer compared to the upward accountability they faced for project funds.

The volunteer is always a risk, the person, because human beings are unpredictable right?! It’s a risk that hopefully they get to accept the culture and adapt to the locality. If that happens, things go very well. And I think that it has happened in, most cases. It’s a complementary form of cooperation and furthermore technical assistance is giving a lot of brainpower and knowledge. On the other hand the grassroots organisations are the ones who control the money, so they don’t face unequal power relations. So we can say that the local organisations aren’t going to feel diminished but can manage things themselves and there is a balance of power that even I feel. (CA22) 58

Claudia, the agronomist in Central America, recalled what she saw of the inspiring empowerment of the group of women (discussed earlier) who had sought the help of Claudia’s gender specialist volunteer counterpart Margarita.

After the training they started to speak the truth, that today they feel different from how they used to be before when they got up to grind, to do

58 Es un riesgo siempre el cooperante, la persona, pues porque los seres humanos somos imprevisibles verdad?! Es un riesgo el hecho de que ojalá llegue aceptar la cultura que llegue adaptar a la localidad pero si eso sucede las cosas marchan muy bien y yo creo que en la mayoría de los casos ha sucedido pues. Yo creo que si porque es una cooperación complementaria y además contribuye el hecho de que si...asistencia técnica que está dando mucho cerebro mucho conocimiento por el otro lado las organizaciones de base son los que controlan la plata, entonces no están en un relación de poder desigual para que digamos, pensando en que las organizaciones locales no se van a sentir disminuida pues en frente, sino que se maneja, hay un balance de poder siento yo incluso (CA22).
the chores and the men humiliated them. It seems that the majority were single women, widows, divorcees abandoned and wounded. They say that they hadn’t any idea that they mattered that much, that they had rights, they used to think before that they were born only to serve their husbands and to look after the children. They said they felt ugly, which made them feel bad about themselves. After the whole training process that Margarita gave them, they said that they now knew that they had their own rights and weren’t slaves to any man and that they were lovely and beautiful and they felt prized and valued. That whole training process helped with their self esteem. Afterwards, they said that they wanted to learn how to read and write and they were supported by a literacy circle. They learnt.

(CA51HC)\textsuperscript{59}

Summary

It was surprising to me that the relational side of the volunteer characteristics, beyond simply practical skills and expertise, are emphasised as much by non volunteer stakeholders. This shows their central and embedded nature according to not just volunteers but also other stakeholders. The revelation that accompaniment was the highest rated feature of a volunteer’s role overall by non-volunteer stakeholders was surprising given the separation sometimes expressed between the broader, more ‘indirect’ aspects of development and the practical ones which are reflected in the debate about cultural exchange vs. development and impact.

In addition to accompaniment, non-volunteer stakeholders saw the value in volunteers accompanying local people and organisations under local conditions and for extended periods. A distinctive part of this accompaniment was that volunteers were accountable to local organisations first within a framework of partnership that IVCOs facilitate. However, the volunteer’s personal motivation and expertise was recognised as not tied

\textsuperscript{59} Después de la capacitación empezaron ellos a hablar verdad, de que hoy se sentían diferente, de como estaban antes cuando se levantaban a moler hacer los quehaceres y los hombres los ‘miyaba’ parece que la mayoría eran mujeres solas viudas divorciadas abonadas y dañadas entonces dicen ellas que no tenían ni idea de que valían tanto, que tenían derechos, ellos pensaban antes que se habían nacido solo para servirle el hombre y cuidarlas hijos, se sentían feas que sentían mal. Después de todo el proceso de capacitación que les diera Margarita dijeron que ya sabían que tenían sus propios derechos y ellas no eran esclavos de ningún hombre y que eran bellas y lindas se sentían precisa y que tenían un gran valor. Todo ese proceso de capacitación les ayudó con su autoestima. Ya después decían que querían aprender a leer y escribir y se les apoyo con un círculo de alfabetización, aprendieron (CA51HC).
solely to the local organisation or the IVCO. This allowed some room for independent, on the ground assessment and challenge that could adjust to the local reality while drawing on the volunteer’s prior experience and different networks.

As a recognised part of the IVCO volunteer framework there was space for and acknowledgment of personal aspects, relationships and cross cultural issues as important tools for capacity development and development more broadly. Equally recognised were the importance of mutual benefit, learning and change that was reflected in what was regarded positively by hosts as ‘horizontal relations’ but left volunteers limited in power and resources like many of their local counterparts. The limited power and resources and other characteristics can be seen as a strength as well as a weakness because of providing opportunities for consolidating ownership, liaison and bridging within and across organisations, that other aid players may lack. None of the characteristics identified were new but the examination here of their importance for non-volunteer stakeholders and why, gives renewed credibility to the earlier claims of volunteers and their facilitating IVCOs. Clearly non-volunteer stakeholders largely accept the distinct characteristics of international volunteers and note the different and in some ways ambiguous but complementary role these characteristics provide to the development context.

**Shifts in thinking and practice for volunteers and other stakeholders**

This section provides explicit consideration of shifts in thinking and practice although it is also important to recall the specific examples integrated earlier when people spoke of volunteer characteristics. We remember for example Claudia (the agronomist) and Margarita (the volunteer gender specialist) who demonstrated their learning and changed behaviour together as part of accompaniment or Maria (the Honduran tourism officer) who could see the volunteers learning the causes not just symptoms of problems
through their volunteer work. The two highest ranked themes were the ‘local direction and joint decision making’ compared to conventional development practice and how the varied work levels and the relative independence of volunteers affected their outcomes and outlooks.

**Local direction and joint decision making**

What does local accountability mean for shifts in thinking and practice? How does it translate into opportunities for local direction of the work and joint decision making about it? How does this affect the work of volunteers, hosts and other development players? Does it complicate the work and if so what are the benefits as well as the struggles/frustrations caused?

Despite the earlier view of former AVI CEO Bill Armstrong against having a local in country IVCO office because it could lessen local accountability and ownership, ACIAR, an Australian agency with projects overseas, sees the value in ‘another’ person the volunteer can go to ‘if they have problems’. This suggests some reluctance to rely on support from the local organisation because the volunteer or perhaps ACIAR’s work may suffer if it is not forthcoming (AUSO1). It might be said this removes the burden Engel (2006) suggested local organisations face when they have to support an international volunteer. It might also be suggested that this can be at the cost of local ownership because local organisations receive ‘free staff” and hence also may undermine local employment and encourage paternalism and dependence.

Diego, a Honduran NGO director, made clear he asked for a volunteer to fit the NGO’s needs and showed the volunteer what these needs were early in the assignment. He said they listened to volunteer advice but in the end it is the NGO’s decisions that predominate. He said only after some time of the volunteer getting to know the local
reality with the guidance of the local organisation, is there some opportunity to take
shared decisions that include the volunteer’s outside expertise.

*In our organisation, negotiation is most important. We always consult with*
*them but the decisions as I would say at the start [are ours]. We ask for a*
*volunteer in order to fill a gap so when he comes what we do is explain the*
*social context, the set of problems we face and then request his help …*
*according to the special skills that he has brought.* (CA28H)

He said when the volunteer puts a counter view, they would listen and weigh up its
relevance and then make their own decision.

*You listen to them and you pay attention to them to the point where it*
*corresponds with our concerns but our ideas prevail.* (CA28H)

Carmen, a Honduran NGO director, explained the situation when she had taken over as
director and how the role of the volunteer in the NGO had to change. Sofia, the
volunteer, had fallen into a decision making role because of limited supervision and
support for the project she was working on. Carmen, the new director, was clear about
the volunteer’s role as she knew it was already clear in the agreement with the IVCO
facilitating the assignment. That agreement, she said, assigned Sofia to work alongside
the executive director, advising her as part of a staff team.

*The decisions had been given to her a lot. …It should not be her who is*
*going to give the authorisation at a high level, or to make decisions because*
*that is not in the agreement…The role of a volunteer needs to be…parallel to*
*the executive director level… to be my support. But they can’t be… higher*
*up than me….the volunteers are alongside. We have to work together…we*
*want to encourage team work.* (CA30H)

Glenda, an NGO representative, explained that on some occasions volunteers were so

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60 En la organización nuestra el diálogo es lo más importante siempre podemos consultar con ellos pero
los decisiones como diga al principio nosotros pedimos un cooperante para llenar un vacío entonces
cuando el llega lo que hacemos es socializar la problemática con el explicarle cual es el problema y luego
de eso solicitar a su asistencia…de acuerdo a la especialidad que el ha traído (CA28H).

61 Se les escucha y se la atiende en el punto en cual es convergente con nuestros ideas pero nuestros ideas
prevalecen (CA28H).

62 Las decisiones se le daban mucho a ella. ….No es ella la que va a dar autorizaciones ya a nivel alto, o
hacer decisiones porque eso no está en el convenio…. el rol de una cooperante, tiene que estar… al nivel
de dirección ejecutiva. … son apoyo mío. Pero no pueden ser… más alto que yo. …los cooperantes están
al lado. Tenemos que estar en conjunto,…nosotros queremos fomentar trabajo en equipo (CA30H).
enthusiastic and keen to achieve something that they were not sufficiently humble in the midst of cultural differences and could create a teacher-student dynamic that did not sufficiently recognise the limitations of technical solutions that might have been appropriate elsewhere but were untried in the new cultural context. Rather, she said, it was important to listen to and learn from local voices and let local people speak and take the initiative.

*A lot of the time cultural problems generate conflict and on some occasions not all volunteers have a degree of humility and awareness that they are working with an ‘underdeveloped culture’ so…the style of working is imposed with new concepts that maybe do work but in other places….One of Paul’s problems is that he is too active in the committee and he wants to talk and he wants..., and I have to tell him ‘be quiet Paul’, so the others may speak so that they start to get involved. (CA22)*

Equally difficult could be a request for a volunteer at a high level of an organisation that staff were not aware of at lower levels. Sometimes lag times between requesting, recruiting and getting a volunteer could also be a contributor to the lack of apparent direction for the volunteer, as could changing staff over the same period. This could be seen as another rationale for having a local IVCO office but again this could also seen as undermining local control, responsibility and ownership. Brian the donor technical officer noted:

*The communication in some of these … departments is so poor that you are talking with a guy up here who says, “Yeah. We will have some of that.” And the person that the VSO is going to be working with probably isn’t informed until the volunteer knocks on the door and says “Good morning.”* (CAMD3)

Maria, a local government official, was clear on the advantage of the global vision brought by Sofia the volunteer she saw working in her municipality. This she said complemented the contextual vision and understanding of local needs that she and other

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63 Muchas veces las problemas culturales generan conflicto verdad y en algunos ocasiones no todos y todas las cooperantes tienen un grado de humildad y de consciencia de saber que están trabajando con una cultura subdesarrollada, entonces, …se llega a imponer la forma de trabajar, en cuanto a metodología y en cuanto a conceptos nuevos que tal vez esos si funcionan pero en otro lado…uno de los problemas de Paul es que es demasiado activo en la mesa y el quiere hablar y el quiere…, y tengo que decirlo cállate Paul, que hablen los otros para que, se llegan a involucrar (CA22).
local technical experts could bring.

Because the international volunteer has a global vision, they can see outside of the local context and this helps us a lot. But we as local experts give the vision of the local country context and the specific needs that must be addressed. (CA570)64

Diego, the Honduran NGO FOCUD’s director, explained how the volunteer had to learn the local environmental conditions and be involved in meetings and learning local knowledge and only then was there a chance for shared decision making.

A volunteer doesn’t know the area, doesn’t know the socioeconomic environmental characteristics of those sectors so when they do their first field work they get to know first hand...We ask questions and we exchange ideas and they are initially a ‘receptor’. Afterwards the transfer process begins and they also play their part…to learn what it is that you eat in that area, how you speak, how you talk. Next in the process there comes an interchange via interactions in meetings where one can express an opinion and touch on important subjects and there is an opportunity to make decisions together. (CA28H)65

A local Salvadoran NGO CESTA’s director Ricardo Navarro, host of volunteers, also highlighted the importance of volunteers cooperating with the local agenda and not imposing their own agenda. He said the genuine accompaniment of local people could instil the volunteer with a grounded understanding of the local situation which is usually different to their home country.

They are different realities and for that reason I maintain that local accompaniment is important in order to translate that to the local reality.

64 Porque el cooperante internacional tiene la visión al nivel mundial, y de lo que ve fuera eso nos ayuda mucho. Pero nosotros como técnicos le damos la visión del contexto del país. Y de la necesidad propiamente que se necesita (CA570).

65 Porque el cooperante no conoce la zona no conoce las características socioeconómicas ambientales de esos sectores entonces en un momento hace su primera gira y va a conocer y…preguntamos y intercambiamos y es inicialmente un receptor después vamos hacer el proceso de transferencia, va también hacer su parte allí…de aprender que es lo que se come en ese zona como se conversa como se habla entonces, ya después durante el proceso viene ya un intercambio a través de la incorporación en reuniones donde se opina y se toca temas y allí se puede hacer una toma de decisiones en conjunto (CA28H).
The volunteer should cooperate with the local agenda and not try to impose their agenda. (CA56H)\(^{66}\)

Preap, a Cambodian government volunteer host, said Natalie the AVI volunteer he supervised was also partly governed by AVI policies and partly governed by her volunteer status, which gave some freedom to express her understanding and opinion unencumbered by project or other institutional influences.

*Because she is from AVI and it really depends on AVI policies or the organisation’s policies so we had to say, I think we need to look at this on a case by case basis. But overall because she is a volunteer probably, she had more freedom in expressing her opinion, her understanding.* (CAMH5)

An insight into a good and well managed relationship between volunteer and host boss is reflected by former volunteer Natalie who obviously recognised, looking back, the wisdom of Preap’s approach with her and the resulting successful work together. It demonstrated an important level of trust and respect in the local manager’s knowledge and supervision showing what is also a common and significant part of the local accountability at its best. This could also be seen as part of a reverse ‘psychology of development’ than that raised earlier by Sergio. It shows the potential for two-way learning and the quiet, gentle lessons hosts in the South can teach volunteers and others from the North, if they are ready to listen and learn. When capable and experienced locals are given the opportunity and responsibility they show how people in the South can and do manage TA well. This is a significant shift in common popular misperceptions and neo-colonial views about the causes and symptoms of poverty as discussed in Chapter Three.

We always worked very well together. *He is a very smart guy and he listens and has respect. I would listen to what he had to say and he would listen to what I had to say and we would always work something out that we thought was appropriate….he has got a lot of wisdom. He could see that I was very, naïve and enthusiastic and he didn’t dampen that. If I said, “I want to do*

\(^{66}\)“Son realidades distintas por eso sostengo que es importante el acompañamiento local para traducir eso la realidad local. …el cooperante debe cooperar con la agenda local no intentar imponer su agenda (CA56H).
“this, or,” he would let me do it but then he would also sort of add into it some considerations, which I generally didn’t hear, because I wasn’t ready to hear them. ... But he was always there to come back to and actually when I started to realise what was going on, then he was there too. (CAMRV1)

Another former volunteer also reflected on her approach to making decisions and the way her process worked unwittingly to get local people and herself on board with their own best ideas.

It wasn’t just a case of me teaching them and transferring my skills. I learnt so much. I would go, this is the way to do it and they would speak to someone about it and they would be like no! I learnt that instead of saying what I thought a really good way of getting things done is ask questions instead and try and lead people to where you are going so that it becomes their idea. Usually they would come up with other things and come up with a heaps better idea than I had had to start with and then we would go with that. (CAMRV3)

So in summary, local accountability is considered a special aspect to the volunteer role. That means that, as well as local direction, there is a particular opportunity for collaborative decision making between volunteers and local stakeholders when compared to large scale institutions. Large scale institutions could be dictated more by global trends and priorities which made it harder to adapt to local realities and the ways local institutions and structures saw fit to respond to them. An NGO observer said volunteer Paul’s enthusiasm meant he was at times too active and sometimes she needed to remind him to wait and listen. Some hosting organisations made very clear that, regardless of how outspoken a volunteer was, they would listen to the advice of a volunteer but they would make the final decision after considering all the options and issues. This was a specific and beneficial product of the structured local accountability of the volunteer. However, many organisations also said that once the volunteer had been there longer and understood the local context, there had been scope for joint decision making in the volunteers’ work-plan and practical contribution.
Overall it is clear from the host organisation’s embrace of line management opportunities over a volunteer that they appreciated the chance this gave them to shape the volunteer’s outcomes. A volunteer, they said, was not to impose but to fit in with the local agenda. An Oxfam representative highlighted this local control by saying while they like to support local organisations with OXFAM staff, they also like the local organisations to use volunteers because that way the local organisations themselves employ them and have more direct decision making power over them. A former volunteer said, that she learnt to ask questions to find out what people thought and wanted. She found gradually that with trust and openness people took the opportunity to propose their own, often more suitable, solutions.

**Work level and independence**

International volunteers’ work level and independence or autonomy came out as a significant factor in achieving shifts in thinking and practice. This was also identified to some extent by volunteers themselves in their survey responses but less so the sense of independence.

Salvadoran NGO director Violetta, explained how she saw the ‘cooperation with solidarity’ of volunteers she requested through MS and CIIR that allowed more horizontal relations to be created. She compared this with the top down accountability her NGO faced for money received, which made little allowance for changes or issues facing the organisation at any particular time. Suggesting volunteers were a form of ‘cooperation with solidarity’, she said this was not numbers focused and hence allowed dialogue, negotiation and reassessment.

> The way MS or ICD or similar organisations support us, enables us to establish more ‘horizontal relationships’ that allow us to initiate change processes. In contrast I think that the others tell you “at this time I need this”, not caring about the changes you have had in the staff of the organisation, but [wanting to know] how much you spent or more in terms...
of numbers or in economical terms. I think that makes the difference, that we can talk with the development cooperation organisation that comes with solidarity, we can talk and negotiate and reflect on things, so that is where I see a huge advantage. (CA53H)

An IVCO staffer explained the accountability of the VSO volunteers and CESTA’s director in El Salvador similarly emphasised the importance of the level of a volunteer as equal to that of a local staff member. He had not accepted the idea once put to him, of a volunteer later being expected to do an evaluation of the organisation’s work, placing the volunteer suddenly and inappropriately at a different level. Ricardo said it did not matter where they were born, they should be on a par with local staff.

*If they are a volunteer, they need to be at our level, they need to struggle like us, equally, you can’t give a status either above or below. That is fundamental - neither above nor below but equal.* (CA56H)

Daniel, an Australian project host, said volunteers faced huge challenges if they were outside a resourced initiative like his.

*If you are a volunteer and placed really on your own, because you are in a developing country, you can’t get access to money. So you want to do something, you can’t. The bureaucracy usually overwhelms you and so you could sit there for two years and do nothing.* (CAMH2)

This host’s views of a volunteer’s independence, local accountability and lack of money suggested the difficulties of effective development without the necessary support and resources. This raised again the different expectations of achievement in terms of short term ‘deliverables’ over longer term and broader development outcomes including capacity development and the Paris Declaration principle of working through local institutions and systems wherever possible. This slower and lower level cultivation of

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67 Como MS o CID nos apoyan permite establecer relaciones más horizontales que nos permiten establecer procesos de cambio. En cambio creo que los demás te dicen ‘mira en este tiempo necesito esto’ no importando que cambios hayas tenido al interior de la gente sino cuanto te gastaste o más en términos de números o en términos económicos. Yo creo que eso hace la diferencia que con la cooperación solidaria creo que podemos hablar, creo que podemos negociar, revalorar también entonces allí le veo una total ventaja (CA53H).

68 si es cooperante, tiene que estar al nivel de nosotros, tiene que pelear igual que nosotros, igual, no le puede dar estatus ni para arriba ni abajo eso es fundamental-ni para arriba ni abajo-igual (Ricardo Navarro-CA56H).
capacity showed an alternate style. Agnes, a UNDP Deputy Resident Representative, confirmed the value of this different style noting that development was partly about getting people to unfurl their inner power. She said volunteers were particularly well placed to do this because of not just their similar work conditions to local people, as the Australian embassy representative Julia said earlier, but also their similar living conditions.

*We all hope that the people can recognise the power that they have within and can actually unfold it. Sometimes they need people to help them recognise this and to help them organise themselves and this is why, for example, all those community conversations become so important.*

...volunteers have a greater connection because people can empathise with them in a better way or they can empathise with people in a better way because volunteers are living the same way -- they blend in to the system. (CAMD2)

The contrary situation can be if volunteers are placed at a higher level without sufficient skills to operate at that level. One UNDP host supervisor, Piseth, said his volunteers were good at the grassroots level but insufficiently experienced to be able to contribute at the higher policy level (CAMH3).

An FAO project manager described the way volunteers on TSEMP were expected to share skills by working at the same level as local staff while also playing a bridging role across institutional stakeholders—possible presumably because of their greater autonomy and independence. He questioned how realistic this expectation was. However, it was interesting to see the clear donor validation of this bridging role where volunteers also developed their skills by working alongside local colleagues. Also expressed was a quiet and subtle frustration that the VSOs were responsible to the government Department of Fisheries and not FAO as was also hinted at earlier by Sok from FAO.

*The staff who are volunteers stationed in the other PIUs have their own professional competencies and the PIUs or provincial implementing units try to utilise them along lines that they are most capable of being able to*
fulfil. ... These things have been assigned, primarily, to the volunteers working in the offices because the local staff are just not fully equipped to handle those jobs at present. ... the volunteers work closely with the professional staff from the Department of Fisheries in order to enable them to obtain those capacities through a working relationship....[the donor] has a very strong expectation of the VSOs to play this mediating role, actually written into the terms of reference of the project. A VSO is expected to play a kind of bridging role, between the FAO component and the DOF. Frankly I think that that is somewhat unrealistic. But, there is a certain expectation that the fulfilment of a more objective overview of the current condition in each of the operating offices could be provided by the [volunteer’s] independence relative to FAO’s contractual support under the hiring by the DOF. So there is an expectation that that kind of feedback could be provided within the project and create an opportunity to be able to respond in situations where problems might otherwise not necessarily be brought forth for open discussion. (CAMH4)

The FAO officer admission is very interesting. They are working on a project framework that explicitly encourages (from the donor) the networking, bridging and frank assessment that volunteers can provide. This is despite perceptions from some development players (and at times volunteers themselves) that volunteers are powerless, because they lack the financial resources to conditionally offer help.

The above case is reinforced by separate and complementary evidence found as part of this research outside field work interviews in relation to VSOs who worked on the Tonle Sap environmental management project in Cambodia. The aide-memoire for the project’s Loan Review Mission affirmed the positive capacity development role and informal activities that led to better use of resources, skills and experiences:

*The project design made no provision for incorporation of voluntary service. However, the relevance of its programs in the project area offered the promise of capacity building in support of the project. The executing and implementing agencies, in consultation with ADB, thereafter concluded partnership agreements with VSO and volunteers were assigned...The VSOs are now considered part of the project personnel and their contributions are taken seriously. This has resulted in positive changes in the way the PIOs and PIUs are run, tasks are planned and reported, and fieldwork is carried out. VSOs regularly take part in these activities and conduct capacity building of PIUs. They also often initiate informal cooperative activities that lead to better use of resources and share skills and experiences. (Asian Development Bank, 2006a, p. 29)*
The ADB’s subsequent quarter’s aide memoire was even more affirming:

*The services provided by VSO for capacity building across the project have become increasingly valuable and cost effective with time.* (Asian Development Bank, 2006b, p. 39)

Preap, the Cambodian government representative, reiterated the idea that volunteers had more autonomy to express a non-institutional position, giving weight to the idea of volunteers as a potentially more neutral bridge between development players.

*A volunteer has more freedom in expressing their opinion, their understanding. If you work for a big organisation, probably you need to respect, you need to follow all their codes of conduct, rules or their interests, so...sometimes you have to talk on behalf of the organisation, not really much as an individual. So that is different I think for a volunteer and a relationship of donor or organisation, big organisation.* (CAMH5)

In addition to the autonomy people suggested volunteers had, there was also a sense that at times, they could apply their grassroots level experience at much higher levels because they were given license to do this by their supervisors. Silja, a UN Volunteer in the national office of FAO, clearly did this as her supervisor Sok described:

*Silja’s contribution is very valuable for the office...at a field level and a technical level and policy level. She has been attending the stakeholder consultation at a national level where policy for addressing issues within the forestry fisheries and land have been discussed, and of course she is also working at the technical level with people from different departments of the government and with the external partners’ experts and also going down to the grassroots by herself observing what’s happening at the grassroots level so I would say that she has been absorbing the reality of issues happening in Cambodia.* (CAMH6)

The VSO in-country staff member recognised the ‘difference’ and ambiguity in the role of many volunteers (compared to other TA staff as mentioned by Brian) and the frustration that can cause because they ‘were not perceived as important enough to listen to’. The strange juxtaposition of a volunteer on a well resourced project raised earlier by Leonie was also clarified as a special opportunity and niche. He also noted the opportunities for volunteers to see and express critiques of the project because of their
different and in some ways ambiguous, but genuinely engaged, place in the structure as the FAO manager noted earlier.

*Should we be providing volunteers where the project has got enough money to provide consultants? I think the volunteers do bring a different perspective, they ...raise issues that other people wouldn’t. Sometimes they shouldn’t be raising those issues, or it is the way they raise them, but I think they can add value.* (CAMI1)

A returned volunteer (CAMRV1) still working in Cambodia, reflected on the way coming in at a lower level it was slower and harder to make a difference. This also reflects the challenge of capacity development as recognised by UNDP’s ten default principles, particularly for example the importance of ‘don’t rush’, building on existing capacity and challenging power differentials (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; OECD, 2006b). This encourages an expansion beyond the idea of development as practice, which in its most bland focus on TA deliverables means providing funds to pay people to ‘get things done’.

There appears to be a real sense that people did not have the same expectations of a volunteer as of either local or foreign people working within their organisation. This led at times to frustration, but also in parallel could provide significant opportunities for influence at the highest and lowest levels as a direct result. Volunteers were at times described as on a par with other staff or even the host’s director. Their ambiguous role in the hierarchy could be confusing but did allow sensitivity to shifting organisational needs. It also provided a significant chance to effect change, because of the credibility they gained by being treated similar to local staff. There was also some acceptance of an individual autonomy, alongside the local accountability and that was tempered through the three way relationship (volunteer, host, IVCO) by the IVCO ethos, support and guidelines.
Summary

The fact that the local accountability and direction of volunteers (and the accompanying limited resources) was criticised as ineffective by some external aid players is good evidence of its existence, as is its strong endorsement by many local hosts. This opens up complications for volunteers’ effective and directed practice when it was lightly managed by busy local staff with a myriad of other priorities. However local accountability and direction setting also allowed strong ownership of volunteer work and plans when it was actively embraced by local hosts. This allowed new opportunities for joint decision making with volunteers on the ground (on the basis of local and external knowledge), though it could also lead to strong influence of enthusiastic volunteers keen for change, when they were not effectively managed. However even in this case, there was an opportunity for resolution because of the structural accountability built into the relationship by the IVCO structure (volunteer, host, IVCO). So the local host staff could take management and direction back when they wished to exercise this authority. Even in the absence of this, the facilitating IVCO could also have a positive, moderating influence on the actions of the volunteer.

The local direction of the volunteer by the local host organisation was complemented and the potential complexities noted above were moderated, to some extent, by the common high level of motivation, skills and initiative of the volunteer. This and the fact that many volunteers did not have a fixed position in the host organisations hierarchy could be frustrating for the volunteer who lacked a clear status in the local organisation. However this also allowed a genuinely frank and yet loyal role that could allow the volunteer to operate more effectively with colleagues or communities in the field, as well as at other levels like policy—-with each helping productively inform perspectives for the other. It also allowed the local organisation to adapt volunteer work agendas to
changing organisational needs rather than be limited by an out of date terms of reference or direction. The combination of local accountability with volunteer flexibility and independence provided an interesting example of what may be required for Paris Declaration aid effectiveness principles of working through local country systems and institutions with mutual accountability.

Volunteers were seen in a more horizontal or parallel role with local staff so there could be dialogue as opposed to one way accountability ‘up’ to donors. Some project managers criticised volunteers’ varied roles as susceptible to weak management structures that might ‘waste’ their expertise because they were seen as lacking enough power in the structure to be taken seriously. Host organisations for their part clearly valued what they regarded as technical advice that was not tied to a particular institutional point of view as they said is commonly the case. The volunteer could internally challenge as well as support local leaders and staff, while providing a view that could encourage broader connections. They could build bridges across their sector and with other organisations. The slight independence from local hosts allowed an opportunity to use their comparatively independent status to advocate to donors alongside and in support of local requests. Volunteers also strengthened local capacity to negotiate and deal with donors, government and other institutions locally and internationally.

Most stakeholders found it easier to see characteristic features of the volunteer role and its broad recognition in the development sector (because of the practical difference it made) than explicitly noting shifts in thinking and practice attributable to the volunteers. This might have been because of the relational role demonstrated for example by less
visible bridging and liaison within and beyond organisations which fits with the understanding of a behind the scenes community development role.

**Recognition of international volunteers in the development sector**

This section discusses in depth the value of volunteers as cultural exchange agents or contributors to development, ranked 2nd overall in priority. It illustrates much of the key debate about international volunteers and their contribution to development. This will be followed by a more nuanced discussion that shows potential synergies as well as tensions for the role of long term international volunteers in development, based on all stakeholders’ views.

This section will also discuss whether non volunteer stakeholders considered volunteers to have a relevant complementary and strategic role in development. Finally it canvasses the non volunteer stakeholder recognition of volunteers on the basis of their capacity to respond to local needs and experience first hand development realities on the ground.

**Cultural exchange vs development and impact**

The question of whether international volunteers contribute to development or are just a form of ‘cross cultural exchange’ is central to this thesis and Sherraden et al. (2006) highlight it in their work. It relates to questions about volunteer development ‘Impact’ as well as how volunteers are perceived and to what extent they provide an entry and training point for development sector professionals. It is particularly interesting to compare broad donor and IVCO perspectives on these issues and analyse them for their conceptual and philosophical underpinnings. Discussion of these views provides an interesting conclusion after the more specific insights and views of local hosts of
volunteers, observers and even South-based donor organisation’s technical/sectoral
officers and IVCO staff.

Two fundamental questions emerge as central to international volunteer recognition:
What do different development conceptions mean for the potential measurement of
volunteers outcomes? And can a relational view of development and the practical
concept of capacity development provide a bridge between the cross cultural dimension
and development? Out of these first two issues emerges the question of how
international volunteering is different to other aid and development modes and the
possibility (partly as a result of this) that there is complementarity between international
volunteers for development and other aid and development players.

I will begin this consideration by presenting a government donor view of the function of
volunteers in development emphasising a perceived recent shift from a focus on cross
cultural experience to ‘real development’:

In the past the focus of the volunteer program... had been cross cultural
experience. [The new program by contrast] has always been about
development so it was never about just the cross cultural. Cross cultural
experience will happen, and we are not saying that is not ... one of the
objectives but the main objective is what will be the development outcomes
achieved... it is not about ... sending these young Australians to have a
cross cultural experience and coming back. They have to make a
contribution to...development....Previously the other volunteer program,
the whole aim was about cross cultural experience....The main focus of the
program was, it was live, live and learn. It wasn’t about having a
development outcome at the end of the placement.

Interviewer: “Actually I think it was ‘Live, work and learn.’”

Yes. It was. Yes. Well, when you say ‘Live, work and learn’ work doesn’t
exactly mean for the development of that country ... it could be work that
you are just doing, work, living and learning. Work could be doing
something for an organisation in that country.... [This is changing so that]
when... assignments are developed the outcomes to be achieved have to be
in a development sense that meet the AusAID objective of alleviation of
poverty. Now anyone could be doing the work just for that organisation, but
it is not towards the higher goal of poverty reduction. (AUSD1)
Understandably the emphasis for this AusAID staff member was on development which he saw in its most basic sense as working towards the key AusAID objective of reducing poverty. Cross cultural experience was, and perhaps could only be, for AusAID, a government aid agency, a secondary objective. It reflects the popular and understandable view, that to achieve development, tackling poverty is the primary task and as a result direct action on this is required. With this view, anything less might be considered an inappropriate diversion of time, energy and funds that could be reducing poverty. AusAID support for well meaning Australian volunteers to go overseas for a cross cultural experience would seem to be an obvious example of that diversion from the ‘main game’.

There was a clear distinction made in the AusAID officer’s comments between the idea of ‘living, working and learning’ and ‘development’. These first three elements don’t sit easily with the development as practice mode discussed in Chapter Three, but are central to the IVCO ethos and structure of volunteering for development discussed in Chapter Four and clearly reflected by the volunteers themselves in Chapter Five. On this basis and through the lens of my own experience the AusAID officer’s comments seemed to be questioning:

1. the development value of ‘living’ in the South, something referring presumably to the oft quoted goal discussed in Chapter Four about international volunteers living alongside local people under local conditions
2. the development value of working for a local organisation, at its request, and on its priorities and
3. the development value of learning compared to the more accepted value of knowledge or skills transfer to developing countries. Implicit is a question about whether learning is a legitimate, philosophically appropriate or even just a
practically efficient and important part of ‘development as practice’. Implicit also appears doubt about whether local people have useful knowledge of their context to bring to the development endeavour.

These are issues that are absolutely central to this thesis because they raise questions about development ends and means and the question of whether there is a valid dichotomy in long term international volunteering between ‘living, working, and learning’ on the one hand and development on the other. I suggest in this thesis there is room to include both – however complex and perhaps counterintuitive this appears – to have the ‘helpers’ learn from the ‘helped’ and the ‘helped’ teach the ‘helpers’. It also encourages us to look for the common ground beyond some of the ideological or political positioning, as is reflected in another quote from an AusAID staffer. She shows a broader recognition of the practical realities of working in a cross cultural environment and this is reflected equally later from other stakeholders. The AusAID staffer explained how a volunteer review team would look differently at what volunteer work ‘achieves’ as well as learns because of the different cultural context:

The review team is discussing those...cross cultural perceptions, what have you learnt about, here you have got a job description, you come and discuss that, the first day with your supervisor, you can’t do that in most of the Asia Pacific countries, you have got to understand the culture, know the key people, know your environment first so they do learn. (AUSD10)

The previous sections of this chapter provided very solid evidence from non volunteer stakeholders for a relational view that embeds cultural exchange and sensitivity into development in instrumental and intrinsic ways. This contrasts with my interpretation of the comments of the AusAID staff member (AusD1). This chapter in particular has been a great opportunity to see if the narrow view (reflected by ‘development as practice’) and the contrasting IVCO philosophy are really contradictory or whether these distinctions are reflected in the views expressed by host organisations, donors, NGO
representatives, observers and former volunteers. The following discussion and evidence puts that specific evidence within the broader evolving philosophical discussion that has challenged the international volunteer sector for many years.

Finnish government funding for their long term international volunteer program was phased out because its 1995 evaluation made similar conclusions to those expressed by the AusAID staff member:

> Governments who fund volunteer organizations want to see more effectiveness and efficiency from them through solutions which fit into their existing administrative structures. … Both active and ex-volunteers define their results in general terms while Finnish policy priorities do not appear to feature prominently in these. (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995, p. xii)

The Finnish review, like the AusAID staff member, clearly accepted many positives of the volunteer program including adjusting to local realities and being appreciated by local hosts but criticised the lack of sufficient achievements based on Finnish government priorities. A former IVCO AVI staff member in some ways confirmed the AusAID belief that for IVCOs the volunteer focus is explicitly avoiding a direct and poverty focused vision for development. He framed the development context and response much more broadly when he said:

> The whole rationale about ... international volunteering from AVI’s perspective, right from the early days of OSB was about the people that you got to know and the work mechanism to do that. Now this is heresy of course ... to many of the international development agencies ... That the work in the development context was important but it was a mechanism to other sorts of connections that came out of it. ... That’s the thing that sparks people’s lives. Except for, I think, the die hard measurable development people who say no, no, it’s about deliverable outcomes .... It’s just another way of imposing Australian beliefs on our neighbourhood. ... It’s about helping other people so they don’t become a bother to us. It’s not about saying we are in this together, we have a responsibility to people and communities in our region. I think there is a quality of difference there between that basic approach. (AUSI3)

So for this former IVCO staff member, development work was seen as the basis for something broader—relationship building and a sense of Australia’s collaborative
contribution to the global community. This raises the question of why one engages in development work as well as how. On the one hand, it may be for the important goal of simply reducing poverty—something relatively easy to measure particularly when a clear financial definer exists for who is considered poor, for example people living on less than $1.00 a day. On the other hand, development is seen in the context of a quest for an interdependent and cooperative global community characterised by equality, justice and sustainability. The former IVCO staffer compared this narrower and technically defined aid project approach, shaped invariably by narrow effectiveness questions, with the broader vision of development discussed in Chapter Three as good change toward a globally harmonious interdependent and cooperative world. However, the two positions need not be incompatible, even if they may have creative tensions implicit in them. In other words we should be encouraged to measure development effectiveness against all five of the Paris Principles including ‘mutual accountability’ rather than just on the grounds of ‘managing for results’. The more specific goals like poverty reduction are potentially complementary with the broader international volunteering mindset and relationship building roles. The difference is perhaps more in the process of getting there and whether there is room for flexibility in the process as well as the breadth of the outcomes including, but not limited to, goals like poverty reduction.

You take that relationship building thing away, in my view, and what you are left with is the arid, aid discussion about pumping money in to a project approach ... we would always say well we would actually sit more comfortable somewhere else. The Prime Minister’s department or something, but once you crunch down into the aid program you are being crunched down into those fundamental constructs of accountability, numbers, transparency, achievability, and log frames. All fantastic tools and very important if you are doing a project approach. But that’s not the only story. And it’s not an either/or...if you have got a political environment which allows you to have those things in place together, they can actually nourish each other. (AUSI3)

Former IVCO CEO Bill Armstrong said that the relationship building role mentioned above can be deepened into a genuine partnership. He suggested development is most
fundamentally about societal change which requires education. Volunteering then provides an appropriate bridge to that.

*Development really is about fundamental change to society, by people working together in partnership to bring about a society in which all have a place and a role and are respected, and so...underneath development work is fundamentally educational....Volunteers have the opportunity to go and live and work and learn alongside of, and in partnership with people who are not as well off as them and learn something about the real causes of poverty and underdevelopment. (AUSO2)*

So with this view, international volunteering for development is about societal change through education about the real causes of poverty and underdevelopment, in parallel with action to change this. He said part of it is about ‘development as change’ in aid terms but also more than that. Part of that breadth was an experiential process as a means to first personal change and then broader change.

*The change comes from the experience. ...We always said in AVI, that the most important work was going to be when you returned to this country because, if you are really serious about bringing about change the only place you can bring about change is in your own life. ... then you move out from that, your own family, your own community that you live in, your own state and then your own country and then maybe the world, and so what you are doing is you are going overseas to build partnerships with people that will work with you to bring about change in your society. (AUSO2)*

Creating change in volunteers and their own society was part of the IVCO goals. Can that be part of a development outcome? It quite clearly depends on how development is conceived and what are seen as barriers to development and facilitators of development. If change means change overseas, change at home, and personal change, then how people become engaged in the journey towards working for international development is also important. This was emphasised in Bill Armstrong’s emphasis on ‘experiential learning’ throughout AVI’s engagement for volunteer recruitment, focused on more than just a post overseas (AUSO2).

Bill Armstrong (AUSO2) suggested the broad development work begins with personal learning and change for the potential volunteer before they go overseas (and may
perhaps even continue at home if they apply but do not actually go overseas for whatever reason). This framework suggests the volunteer role is not just in ‘doing development’ overseas but also working for change at home when a volunteer returns or even if they never go! However if volunteers did go, he says, they were to work on what the partner/hosts in the South wanted and requested.

In other words, the former IVCO CEO says AVI wanted to respond to genuinely local requests from the South for assistance, while being realistic about what could be achieved, given the many constraints and barriers to development. The IVCO aimed at making a positive and practical development contribution that was not connected solely to a project approach because it could have a broader and longer term vision. So with this argument, volunteers could and did make a contribution to projects of aid and development organisations at the same time as doing something quite different—something beyond simply ‘development as practice’.

The key approach here was that volunteers were seen to be working in partnership with, and at the request of, people in the South to bring the changes the host emphasised as important. This was also reflected in OSB/AVI’s choice not to have in country field offices prior to 2004 unlike most other IVCOs like VSO or UNV. Bill Armstrong says AVI resisted pressure to have field offices because it undermined that local autonomy and local relationship. With field offices he felt:

The volunteer program then becomes Australia’s volunteer program in somebody else’s country, doing good things for those people. Controlled by us in their own country, instead of the fundamental philosophy of us in partnership sending some Australians to work with them in their country, under their rules, under their conditions, to do the job they decide to do.

(AUS02)

69 This was AVI/OSB practice until 2004 when it opened regional field offices in a number of countries.
In the field a different IVCO, VSO, provided some further insight into the function of volunteers in development and also emphasised the long slow process of development and the need to explicitly manage expectations to avoid the perception that an individual volunteer would create major change by ‘development as practice’ or ‘doing development’. There was also a clear and explicit focus away from review of individual volunteer achievements to review of the three way collaboration between the volunteer, the host organisation and the IVCO.

*The philosophy within VSO, which is hammered home into volunteers, is “We are not expecting you to go out there and change the world, and don’t worry if there are only small changes that you have contributed to because it is a long process, and you’re part of it.”* Trying to manage their frustrations about it so they are not: “I’ve been here two years and I haven’t achieved enough.” “I must show that I have done something.” We are ... constantly re-affirming that it is not them we are assessing....We have changed the name from a placement review to a partnership review so it is really looking at all of us together. (CAMI1)

This emphasised the three way development partnership between VSO, local organisations and volunteers and illustrates that the volunteer is only a part of that and is explicitly encouraged by their IVCO to see themselves that way. This encouraged local ownership and collaboration about what is done because of significant input and line management by the local partner who requested the volunteer.

This might be regarded as capacity development, which is more subtle and does not necessarily demonstrate immediate tangible results but can strengthen and build on the capacity of individuals and institutions. Working through existing structures is an important principle for most IVCOs but this is more difficult when other stakeholders have a strong stake in specific goals or initiatives like projects. As raised earlier, accountability to local institutions can become more complicated when donors exert pressure for results as Mathew, a VSO officer, explained:

*We are under pressure from [a donor] to show evidence of effectiveness. That’s a little point of contention at the moment. It’s about trying to prove*
something that’s intangible and also we have our own systems for monitoring effectiveness which aren’t to do with line management and monitoring people’s activities. There is no way that we would be able to spend our time line managing the number of volunteers that we have and it’s against our ethic. (CAMI3)

As Mathew said, line managing volunteers is against their ethic of local accountability and an emphasis on volunteers as central.

So in Mathew’s eyes, it was the volunteer not the project that was central to VSO’s value adding. However, the donor might hold a different view, hence the pressure for measures of effectiveness which could potentially lead to unconscious pressure on volunteers to ‘do development’ to ensure milestones are achieved rather than create ownership and develop capacity. This was a particularly awkward situation for the IVCO when it is the local partner, not them, that line manages the volunteer.

Within a donor funded project the possibilities of being task focused, we have said we will do a certain amount of activities and we have to make sure that training happens. We signed up for it but once more the difficulty of working with semi free agents, volunteers, it can be quite difficult. ... I find managing donor funds quite hard with volunteers. (CAMI3)

In other words there is a tension between being task focused, as is more emphasised with donor/project funds, and the IVCO volunteer ethos and autonomy which empowers local line management but affords the IVCO less direct control over outcomes. This makes project management harder for IVCOs. Hence an IVCO measure of the effectiveness of a volunteer within a local organisation that’s working on sectoral institutional and capacity development goals is not easy and may be quite different to a donor’s project. IVCO field representative Mathew explained how he gauges volunteer effectiveness, which is clearly more oriented to capacity development than just the more hard skills discussed in Chapter Three and more associated with the conventional TA outcomes focus.

I use quality of relationship as probably my main gauge of effectiveness.... I find it scary, knowing what are we signing up to and what are we really
able to deliver. So, it is a really tricky one. You know, to what extent a volunteer, a volunteering organisation is suited to it. (CAMI3)

This quote came from VSO which received donor funds for volunteers as part of the ADB funded TSEMP project. The situation shows the tension that applies for a volunteer organisation without line management responsibility, but with an expectation of delivering tangible project related results. Line management of the volunteer work rests with the organisation the volunteers are based in. So there is a potential disconnect between a volunteer strengthening the capacity of an organisation to do project work and the achievement of the work itself. To help balance this, local ownership of the project is obviously crucial. However, it would be equally difficult to attribute the success or failure of project outcomes simply to volunteers when the local organisation’s capacity and context is probably going to have greater impact. The volunteer’s contribution to institutional capacity development may be more feasible to measure in some form as the VSO representative suggests above.

As can be seen from these quotes, there is debate about how international volunteering is linked to development but also more particularly what development means and how that is defined in explicitly attributable or relational terms. As one government donor said, for them it is about poverty reduction as one of THEIR key development goals. This for example was seen by a number of IVCOs as distinct from international volunteers working FOR local organisations rather than explicitly ON government or other donor goals. This poses something of a tension for IVCOs with volunteers based in and managed by local organisations, which are supported by donor funded projects. Donors want to see results and yet IVCOs are not in a position to guarantee them because of working through local organisations and volunteers, neither of which they have direct control over. What they can do is shape relationships and encourage an environment that is conducive as Ellerman recommends for “autonomy respecting self
help” (Ellerman, 2004). The broader case is reflected also in the AusAID/AVI examples, but this issue is in even sharper relief when special projects fund volunteers more explicitly.

As the AusAID officer said earlier, a local organisation’s work goals are not necessarily the same as a donor’s priorities (and the impacts will be different). Nevertheless there was evidence of this ambiguity in the perspectives of other stakeholders including local hosts, on the ground donor government representatives, technical staff and even former volunteers still working in development.

Jennifer, one European government donor government field representative in Central America, highlighted the broader development awareness and education function of international volunteers from her own perspective as a former VSO volunteer. In keeping with Mathew’s emphasis, she also highlighted that one aspect she learnt as a volunteer was the important value of relationships as a basis for development.

> I do believe in the development awareness function of volunteers. Sitting in a community in Sierra Leone doing adult literacy … that radically changed my life, …the idea of doing development in luxury hotels and the kinds of commitments that you feel that you should bring to your work. The whole thing relies on the personal relationships that you build, that’s how development works, and that’s how in the end you build institutions, on the basis of changing of people’s personal understanding through the relationships you built. (CA20D)

Jennifer’s comment resonates strongly with the IVCO CEO’s earlier comment about development starting with personal change and moving outward through relationships that can strengthen institutions and people and living under similar conditions rather than living apart from people and their reality.

The debate about ‘direct’ vs ‘indirect’ or ‘goal oriented’ versus ‘process oriented’ or relational approaches to development was also highlighted by NGO observer Sergio. He
suggested the need for a cost-benefit analysis of volunteers because of the substantial adjustment period for a volunteer coming from the North before they could make a real contribution (CA31O). He suggested that because of the time spent learning and acclimatising for someone without development experience, only 50% of volunteer’s time is useful as ‘real support’. This may be particularly important for the local organisation requesting the volunteer to fulfil a specific practical niche over a specific period. However, even this efficiency minded observer recognised the value of cross cultural exchange by ‘young Northern professionals’ and the potential usefulness of raising local spirits by outsider accompaniment.

*In applying a cost-benefit analysis... their[the volunteer’s] inefficiency is clear ... it seems to me that those programs from developed countries that seek to build educational bridges, cultural bridges between people from the South and people from the North are important. But we should call them that don’t you think?...In practical terms they aren’t development programs, it is more as cultural exchange programs that they have their validity because...in this global society one loses the importance of such things. For... our people the opportunity to be able to develop direct human links with people is very important. (CA31O)*

So while this observer criticised the ‘inefficiency’ in cost-benefit terms of a volunteer, he explicitly recognised the importance in our globalised world of programs that can build educational and cultural bridges between people of the North and South. He said they should not be called development programs but were particularly important because they provided people in the South with opportunities for direct human linkages with people who they would never have the chance to meet otherwise.

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70 Al aplicarle un análisis de costo, beneficio, queda clara... su ineficiencia…. me parece que es importante digamos aquellos programas desde los países desarrollados que buscan construir puentes de educación, puentes culturales entre nuestros pueblos del sur y los pueblos del norte. Pero habría que llamarlos así no?...en términos prácticos no son programas de desarrollo son más programas de intercambio cultural, como tiene su validez?...en este mundo globalizado se pierde la noción de la importancia de esas cosas? para...nuestro pueblo, la importancia de poder tener la oportunidad de desarrollar vínculos directos humanos con personas (CA31O)
Sergio said cultural exchange programs permit young Northern professionals to see the reality of life in the South and the complexity of development processes while also giving people in the South the morale boost of being able to relate directly to people from developed countries. He said this showed:

*That there is a level of solidarity from those people towards these here. It lifts the spirits of people here at a particular time. It is really important sometimes the part that psychology plays in development processes.*

(CA310)71

In this sense there is recognition of a valid broader development role for international volunteers particularly from the North, in terms of education of the volunteers in development processes and realities as well as building direct human links of solidarity between people as a way of raising spirits. This ‘psychology of development processes’ that he highlighted, can be viewed as part of the broader development view, but can be equally important as Ellerman’s (2005) indirect approach or in terms of capacity development and creating ownership for more practical development.

Leonie, a UNDP Project advisor in Cambodia, commented on the present donor-driven results focus and what could be lost with an unthinking application to the work of international volunteers:

*AusAID is expecting more results-based outcomes, which I think is unfair because the volunteer doesn’t have additional resources to help achieve so-called results. I think one of the contributions that volunteers make, that is different, ...[is] they can present themselves as here to learn about the culture. They are here to interact on a more relaxed basis. We as advisors are really driven by the donor. ... it is a pity that managerialism or whatever it is that is driving this results-based stuff and applying it to volunteering doesn’t appreciate that sufficiently.*

(CAMO1)

This idea supports the earlier IVCO suggestion that at one level the simple application of development effectiveness or results-based management did not suit the peculiarities

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71 “que hay un nivel de solidaridad de esos pueblos hacia estos. Que a la gente aquí en un momento, le levanta como los ánimos. A veces es muy importante toda la parte de la... de la psicología, en los procesos de desarrollo” (CA 31O).
of the broader volunteer for development role. It implies that deeper, more sophisticated tools had to be developed, along with an acceptance that socio-cultural interactions can have indirect and direct practical results. This can be partly through the psychology of development that may have political implications when it breaks down a perception of ‘the other’ and appreciates the importance of difference, not just superficial commonalities (M. Bennett, 1993). The focus on capacity development by volunteers can be one way of gaining a broader stakeholder consensus on at least part of the niche of international volunteers. How to demonstrate the value of international volunteers and capacity development is not easy though as VSO’s Mathew said earlier.

Brian, a donor government agency representative in Cambodia explained to me how he sees volunteers as technical assistance but not just cheap TA because: “Rather than costing ten thousand a month, it is costing ten thousand a year” (CAMD3).

He explained some confusion about, how volunteers were locally seen and how they were managed. He also concurred with the IVCO view expressed earlier that volunteers were semi-free agents who are not line managed by the IVCO. He said government staff were initially confused by this volunteer technical assistance because it did not fit the norms of more conventional ‘project TA’.

*I don’t think Hun could get his head around the fact that she was a volunteer,... ‘Can’t you get a proper job?... until it was explained where Mary came from, and the experience she could bring. She pulled it together really well and by the end of it he realised what he had. ...somebody with a lot of skills, a lot of management experience. But up front there was this sort of conceptual problem with it... because project TA would probably come in with resources and a set of deliverables... when somebody is a volunteer on basically a local wage, it must be quite difficult managing, but,... they are not managed in terms of deliverables and output. (CAMD3)*

What the donor technical officer highlighted is at least an initial local lack of clarity on what was expected of a volunteer, what the experience rather than a stereotype really showed they can do, and who they do it for. It suggested volunteers were seen as different to other forms of TA because of why they were there and who they were
accountable to. The fact that they were managed first and foremost by the local organisation was recognised as not easy, but nevertheless the chosen way of working, for the IVCO and very much in keeping with the Paris Principle of ‘mutual accountability’.

Daniel, a volunteer host organisation manager, highlighted the invaluable practical field experience volunteers gained and the ‘field craft’ this nurtured. He said many aid administrators not only did not have this they did not have the self criticism to see that they did not have it.

One of the important things for...the volunteer part of aid, is enabling people to get into aid as a career. It...gives them a good understanding because it usually goes in the field and I've seen aid administrators, I see them all the time, who have no field craft....some of these people will be managing hundreds of millions of dollars, and they have no field craft at all, and they are hopeless. And not only that, they think they have. (CAMH2)

Many organisations, both donor and host, as well as observers commented on the nurturing of field savvy development practitioners as crucial for the development sector (and its staff development). This host said he had seen volunteers moving into key development roles as a result of their practical volunteer development experience and the complex and difficult situations they experienced and had to problem solve in. Similarly in Honduras, an NGO representative Tomás commented on the experience the volunteers gained that made them sought after by a range of development NGOs there.

It’s not the same reading about organisational theory ...as to be in the routine work every single day trying to solve an organisational problem....It’s not accidental that out of the people that volunteered through CIIR, there are many who now work in these organisations ...Oxfam, CAF, Christian Aid. These organisations are those which have professionals working in development and they prefer them [the former volunteers] ... because they know the field, they know how to resolve situations in the field. (CA290)\(^{72}\)

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\(^{72}\)“No es lo mismo ir a leer la teoría organizativa …que estar en lo cotidiano todos los días tratando de resolver un problema organizativo … y no es casual que de las personas que trabajaron en el ciir hay...
However the importance of practical field experience or learning was not celebrated for its own sake by some development practitioners. Volunteer host and commercial aid contractor Daniel said he was concerned by the mixing of development with ‘adventure’ or cross-cultural exchange for its own sake as Sergio mentioned earlier.

_People who come here for an adventure are wasting our time. Maybe it is good for them and, it might be great for their career or whatever, but it doesn’t contribute much. Most of the people who come here for a cultural exchange or an adventure don’t contribute…. They might take a lot back but they are not giving much._ (CAMH2)

But Daniel saw this ‘taking without giving much back’ as different from a volunteer combining development practice with the necessary cultural acclimatisation and learning. This, he saw, as a legitimate part of becoming a development practitioner or professional.

_People who come here to establish a career have to have that understanding, tolerance, they have to be able to learn the culture…. The first thing you do is learn about the history of Cambodia and understand the people and where they are coming from, because if you don’t, everything you try to relate to them is going to be out of context. You can’t be involved in development assistance without that sort of cultural understanding. It’s hand in glove. But if you are only coming here for that, then, it might be great for you but it is not good for them. I say, ‘You are not here to take. You are here to give.’ _ (CAMH2)

There was a clear sense that even if development was seen as a largely one way ‘giving’ of technical assistance, you needed to understand the local context in order to do that well. It was interesting however that Daniel, the above project manager (of a commercial development contractor), did not refer to the well paid adviser salaries as “taking” in the same way. This was implicitly seen as usually the best way for them to get high level, professional and well resourced help. However, a commercial development contractor’s embrace of the different volunteers’ contribution or niche, even in their pragmatic commercial development contract work, highlighted their

muchos que trabajan en estas organizaciones …de Oxfam, CAF, Christian Aid. estos organizaciones son los que tienen profesionales en el desarrollo y los prefieren …. porque conocen el campo, conocen como resolver situaciones en el campo. (CA29O).
acceptance of mixed motivations and catalysts for varied but constructive development contributions. This was to their credit and made this ambiguous commercial development territory worth engaging with but with due care.

A Cambodian government official Preap saw the local conditions and motivation of volunteers as important even if it was partly gaining experience and partly contributing to local capacity by sharing skills. He said:

Most of them have a different intention because they are volunteers and their objective coming to work here is not to earn money. For them it is to gain experience or to have a country like Cambodia strengthen capacity. So a bit different order from a worker or international consultant...they work because they earn money. For an NGO worker, it is probably a similar philosophy to a volunteer. (CAMH5)

Here there was clear credence given to volunteers working under local conditions with non monetary motivation as distinctive from other aid staff (except in NGOs). This different mode, with its focus on two way exchange and learning, can be seen as a different means to achieving capacity development ends.

In Central America Diego, an NGO volunteer host organisation director, saw the importance of international volunteers as cultural interchange and personal interaction as long as they were not just out for adventure and also filled the organisation’s strategic requirements. He said that by learning about and engaging with the social and environmental problems the organisation was tackling locally, they could begin a mutual learning journey that included the personal and cultural.

Volunteers are...a help to fulfill our strategic requirements...now if they are...just having an adventure in order to get to know things, to pass the time, it can become a burden....But when they are contributing they develop an important sensitivity for the country’s socio environmental problems, and the idiosyncrasies as well, because they have to join in with the local way of doing things. The personal exchange evolves to the extent that one keeps learning from the other side, right? So it’s a richness that sometimes becomes personal because as one interacts with the volunteer, there is also
a cultural exchange, they learn a lot as do we about other cultures.  
(CA28H)73

Central American NGO director and volunteer supervisor Violetta spoke of the concrete difference a recent volunteer gender specialist (Margarita) made in her NGO. Margarita strengthened the institutional capacity of a diverse group of professional staff as well as the communities the NGO worked with in the field as noted earlier by her agronomist counterpart Claudia. This was possible because of her ability to adapt her expertise to share at all levels, including a grassroots and practical level. The institution as a whole clearly consolidated its ownership of the importance of gender issues and took the work further because they saw its strategic importance. Violetta said:

Margarita left us rich fruits because that [gender] was her speciality and she also had the ability to reach the communities, to put her knowledge into practice and to prepare all CARASS staff, which is a large group of agronomists, social workers, doctors, nurses, and trainers. A gender strategy was created for CARASS because for us it’s something strategic within our strategic organisational plan and so it responds to the organisational vision...The volunteer helped us prepare it and then she left but we took it up again in an institutional manner because we believe that it’s something that is very strategic for the development of the communities.  
(CA53H)74

Central American NGO director Ricardo Navarro spoke from his experience with volunteers of the important international dimension and insights international volunteers brought. He said these were not just responding to specific local technical requirements

73Los cooperantes son…ayudas que tienden a llenar nuestros requerimientos estratégicos…, ahora si son …de repente aventurando por conocer, por pasear se puede transformarse en una carga verdad … allí estuvo contribuyendo y eso es importante la sensibilización que va adquiriendo a la problemática socio-ambiental del país a los idiosincrasias también porque tiene que sumarse a los hábitos nacionales. El intercambio personal se van generando el grado de que uno va aprendiendo de cada una de los partes verdad o sea es una riqueza que a veces se vuelve personal en que uno va interactuando con el tipo entonces hay un intercambio cultural también, tanto aprenden ellos como nosotros aprendemos de otros culturas (CA 28H).

74 Dejo muchos frutos a nosotros porque eso era su especialidad y también tuvo la capacidad de llegar a las comunidades, de poner en práctica sus conocimientos y capacitarnos al interior de todo el personal de CARASS que somos un grupo grande, entre agrónomos, trabajadores sociales, médicos, enfermeras, promotores. Se formo al interior de CARASS la estrategia en genero para nosotros es algo estratégico que va dentro de nuestro plan institucional estratégico entonces responde a una visión institucional…La cooperante nos lo dejo y se fue sino que nosotros lo tomamos en forma institucional porque creemos que es algo muy estratégico por el desarrollo de las comunidades (CA53H).
as identified earlier, but also at a social and cultural level which was harder to measure but no less important in his view. He thought they might have achieved the same outcomes without the volunteers but despite that he was glad he had had them. He felt they had brought a wider international relations element that helped local people ‘understand themselves’ better in relation to others from other parts of the world.

I feel that you have to be connected with the international dimension because it is important. I don’t know if, on our own, we would have been able to achieve all that the volunteers have come to teach us, perhaps yes, but I don’t regret that the volunteers have been here...I am happy that they have been [here] because they bring another perspective and see things differently and the exchange of ideas is fundamental. It helps us to know ourselves better and this is important because I see that Muslims aren’t my enemies, they have other beliefs but they aren’t my enemies. Neither are the ‘gringos’ [sic]...with volunteers you can’t only look at it from the point of view of a technical result or what can be measured. There are a series of cultural and social relationships that cannot be measured which are very important. (CA56H)75

This section concludes on the basis of the stakeholder information gathered and in relation to the questions posed at the start of the section, that: Volunteers play specific roles in development and contribute to Ellerman’s (2005) broader notion of autonomy respecting assistance or Thomas’s (2000) notion of development as vision, historical process, and practice. These broad roles contribute to a relational view of development.

Volunteers were accountable to their local host organisation as well as themselves and their facilitating IVCO. They were in an unusual and in some ways ambiguous position because as well as being locally managed, they had in some ways neutral or independent status. They were not constrained by a narrowly defined role or level in the local organisation but also not beholden directly to a donor or line manager outside the

75 Yo siento que lo internacional tiene una dimensión importante hay que ser vinculado...con ella. Yo no sé si todo lo que nos han venido a enseñar los cooperantes lo hubiéramos podido lograr nosotros quizás si pero no lo repinto que han estado los cooperantes....Estoy contento que han estado porque dan otra perspectiva y ven las cosas distinto y el intercambio de ideas es fundamental, o sea nos ensena a conocernos y esto es importante porque yo vea que los muslámenes no son mis enemigos ellos tienen otras creencias pero no son mis enemigos. Los gringos tampoco,...con cooperantes, no hay que verlo únicamente del punto de vista del producto técnico o que se puede medir. Hay una serie de relaciones culturales y sociales que no se puede medir que son muy importantes (CA 56 H).
organisation. This made direct line management sit with local managers and made it difficult for IVCOs to commit to outcomes they had limited control over.

While a dichotomy can be painted between cross cultural exchange and the impact of development practice, non-volunteer stakeholders generally valued as a minimum the instrumental benefits from appropriately contextualising volunteers’ development practice in order to achieve their goals. At its height there was recognition particularly by local volunteer host organisations of the value of mutual learning for mutual benefit, towards local as well as global justice and development ends. There was recognition among development practitioners of the importance of cross cultural awareness, learning and interchange to achieve long term practical development outcomes, nurture crucial ‘field craft’ in people wanting to break into the development sector, as well and international links that promoted solidarity and contributed to the all important ‘psychology of development’, easily missed with a simple technical focus. The key was that the cross cultural and relational role was directly linked to practical development outcomes, particularly as requested by local organisations/governments.

Long term international volunteers were seen as different, and at times, puzzling players in development. They did not easily fit the normal TA worker profile not only because they were comparatively low cost and not motivated primarily by money, but also because they were not seen and did not see themselves as largely responsible to donors (or even to some extent their facilitating IVCOs) compared to other forms of technical assistance. They were seen as locally accountable and contributing to more relaxed interactions, relationship building and learning in a way that paid TA did not have time or the terms of reference for. They also were seen as an advocacy and educational link to other countries, particularly in the North whose global interactions had profound
policy and financial implications. There was therefore a clear sense that international
volunteers complemented the work of local and international development players
through their relational approach and capacity development roles. They also built
bridges between different development players and institutions, countries and regions.

**Complementary and strategic contributions to other forms of development
cooperation**

In Chapter Five it was clear that volunteers felt an awkward relationship existed with
other forms of development cooperation. This was felt through a perceived lack of
respect despite a recognition that there were significant real and potential synergies in
joint and complementary work. Interestingly among other stakeholders (as can be seen
by its ranking as 10th), there was genuine recognition of the complementary role
volunteers could and often did play overshadowing the tentative and modest sense of
this not just from the volunteers themselves but even some IVCO representatives. This
section reflects the evidence for this from volunteer host organisations as well as donor
representatives and project implementers. The complementary and strategic
contributions of long term international volunteers can be linked to three key areas
which will be discussed in this section:

1. Their linking and bridging work between organisations and initiatives as well as
   within agencies;
2. Their capacity development work which complements high level policy change
   processes and potentially provides a conceptual and practical bridge between the
   possible dilemma between the cross cultural and development dimensions;
3. Their relative independence and neutrality which provides a monitoring,
   networking and challenging role to a range of players including their own host,
   as well as donors, governments and IVCOs.
In 1997 the Australian government set up a new volunteer program specifically targeting young people called the Youth Ambassador for Development Program as discussed in Chapter Four. Given the donor questioning identified in the last section of the distinction between ‘real development and cross cultural exchange, anecdotal evidence suggested, as might be expected, some reluctance among AusAID staff toward the program. However the creation of the program gradually fostered an important shift in AusAID ownership of volunteering, driven partly by a strong endorsement of it by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer. I discussed the issue in a meeting with AusAID staff and Teresa explained the growing acceptance as well as the difficulty conveying the nuanced understanding of the volunteer section.

People still don’t understand the role volunteers can play. Also the role volunteers can play compared to the role technical experts play…. Volunteers have technical expertise and experience but they are not being employed as technical experts, they are being placed as volunteers so it is catching that subtle difference. (AUSD10)

Teresa, the AusAID staff member, clarified the ambiguity in the role and the lack of understanding of how it was different to technical experts. She confirmed however that the new Youth Ambassador program was ‘owned’ institutionally by AusAID and compared this with organisations running two of the other Australian volunteer programs (AVI & ABV) that receive funds from AusAID but clearly did not have the same organisational ownership though they both received AusAID funds.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) uses volunteers on its projects. Tim, a staff member, said they started in 1994 to encourage this as a tool for capacity development through an Australian presence. ACIAR started to consider how it might respond to partners with particularly low capacity that needed more than just very short visits by busy Australian scientists. They decided a more long term Australian presence would be beneficial but saw at one level it would be too expensive,
apart from other difficulties, given the busy work schedules of the scientists that worked in universities and other busy institutions. He saw that:

*If we can help get Australian volunteers into ministries and research institutes that we work with, not just on an ACIAR project but just as part of a normal volunteer program that has spill over benefits for us anyway….My group is trying,…to educate partner organisations that we deal with… to put their own applications in for volunteers to work in their institutions….I am doing that in ACIAR’s interest but I am also doing it in the interest of the partner countries. There has been some success, volunteers have been placed.* (AUSO1)

Tim suggested that there are indirect development benefits by encouraging volunteers for their own work and beyond it, in keeping with local needs.

Jennifer, the European donor representative in Central America, highlighted what she saw as the importance of international volunteers’ ‘small’ contributions if they were properly linked to leverage greater impact for change. She described the background facilitating role of a group of French volunteers working in Nicaragua, at the time of a visit by the UK Minister for International Development and the policy impact it had.

*Because they’re working with the women’s groups, they helped set up the dialogue in Managua….We had a policy dialogue so those volunteers were stuck out in the kitchen we didn’t see them. They were invisible they were brilliant! They really played a facilitating role….They are doing their work, community level work, with the women linking women or producers and tortilleras in the market and had a policy level impact which is going to influence the Minister. He talks about this experience wherever he goes now in international conferences, the Inter-American Development Bank in Washington.* (CA20D)

Jennifer, the donor representative, clearly valued the facilitating role of the volunteers and could see the potential of linking such practical experience with other high level aid players (like development banks) who needed to get those field insights (though she admitted she herself did not know where most volunteers were based in Nicaragua).

Talking about the Development Bank staff, she said:
They have a problem in getting out of Managua. So there’s a role for us in trying to link volunteers. If I had a good map of where the volunteers were and what experiences they were in...one could try and play a role whereby people who fly in and out from Washington and do program design from the jet,...can actually somehow be linked in to some people who are actually working and know what’s going on outside Managua. (CA20D)

Violetta, Central American NGO director and volunteer host, saw a role for alliances with all forms of international cooperation but felt a volunteer provided a more intensive form of cooperation because they work within the local organisation.

We as an organization ...establish processes, and for those processes we have different allies. ...Because a volunteer...is within our organisation they can give their contribution as part of the whole process. (CA53H)

UNDP project manager in Cambodia, Leonie, questioned the direct insertion of volunteers into the official aid program and implied this was done as an inappropriate coopting mechanism for a program that was formerly more independent of government (CAMO1).

As Amanda, an in-country AusAID staff representative, suggested – they had a real interest in using volunteers as an informal monitoring tool for elements of the government aid program (CAMD1). There is clearly a tension here between the volunteers potentially losing their distinctive role and yet at another level playing an informal but useful feedback role to government about local realities. More than providing a simple monitoring role, the volunteer could be seen as someone who was more independent and hence in solidarity with those who were trying to comply with best practice but might feel pressured by other influences.

Youth Ambassadors and volunteers can ... being outside the local government system, be seen as someone who will not be corrupt and who can keep an eye on things I guess. [This supports] the locals who may want to do the right thing but may be being leaned on by other people. (CAMD1)

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76 Nosotros como organización...establecemos procesos, y dentro de esos procesos tenemos diferentes aliados. ...un cooperante...dentro de nuestra organización, es alguien que nos viene a dar su aportes dentro de todo un proceso (CA53H).
In other cases there was also a positive role for volunteers to break down donor misconceptions and times where volunteers played a key role in strengthening the capacity of their host organisations to better advocate their own goals to donors instead of simply being overly influenced by external donor goals and objectives.

Amanda clarified their different and less hands-on involvement with other Australian volunteer programs and volunteers compared to the Youth Ambassador Program.

> AVIs is a somewhat different level of involvement. ... We sort of approve their overall country strategy, which is a new process that came in a year or two ago, but we don’t generally approve individual placements. (CAMD1)

AusAID staff on the ground also suggested that there was some flexibility about priorities despite its encouragement of volunteers aligned with its priorities. Using volunteers as sports policy advisers or coaches was one example given (CAMD1). So for AusAID there was some recognition of the way volunteers could complement its work by giving a real indication of how things were going on the ground including at times correcting official misperceptions. Because of this, they liked to shape where volunteers go but it was noted there was still room for independent placements in all volunteer programs and particularly those with less overt government involvement and ownership. The grassroots linkage was not unlike the role advocated by Jennifer the European donor representative in Central America earlier. It was also providing a reality check from the volunteers’ unique perspective living and working under local conditions of the genuine difficulties faced by local structures and institutions.

> Broadly we need a sense of what is going on out there and, to a degree, what we can expect of those systems. (CAMD1)

Agnes, a UNDP Deputy Resident Representative (DRR) in Cambodia, saw the opportunity for volunteers to diplomatically challenge and encourage their local counterparts because they were, to an extent, somewhat independent experts and not as affected by other pressures.
All the volunteers have to be somehow diplomats, ... to be respectful of the local context, of the local traditions, of the local way of thinking, but maybe you have a little bit more of that flexibility to try sometimes of challenge a little bit, your counterparts. You may be less willing to engage if you know the rest of your life is tied to how people are going to perceive you right now. (CAMD2)

Mark, a returned volunteer still working in Cambodia, contrasted his new role as consultant on a challenging project, with his former volunteer role that he said had less explicit vested interest and therefore, as the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative Agnes said, allowed an opportunity to challenge/question matters.

I’m a freelance consultant ... and the partner is the Cambodian government....Even coming from the outside, supposedly with no conflict of interest, suddenly you are complicit because at the end of the day, this project isn’t fantastic. We probably shouldn’t be here doing what we are doing but we will be the last ones to criticise how the government is handling their part of it.....It is a pragmatic thing. We just have to get it done, nothing is perfect, but having volunteers inside I think it gives a bit of a control over that. (CAMRV2)

Brian, the European government donor technical adviser, saw the volunteers as trusted contributors with an appropriately broad perspective. He provided a different angle on a similar rationale – agreeing with the IVCO assessment of volunteers as helping link the bigger picture together and strengthening local organisational capacity.

We are hoping to ... help build the capacity within the departments, but ...who is responding to these needs? Some of it is NGOs. It’s a bit unclear how the line departments are linked into that. ... so there is a real role for, somebody and that might be a role that a VSO could undertake....For a generalist to help with processes, it is not necessarily the technical so they don’t actually need anybody in fisheries with technical fisheries experience, what they need is somebody who understands how plans are put together, how you monitor, ...and in that context, ... a general support function. It is a safe pair of hands who understands the bigger picture. (CAMD3)

Another local Cambodian volunteer host, Preap, this time a government manager again recognised as useful the broad vision, the capacity development and specific technical expertise his volunteer Natalie had brought in the area of climate change.

Probably we under-used her but still I think by working with her we have made a lot of good progress in capacity, technical capacity building,
institutional strengthening in the field of climate change and a forward looking aspect also. (CAMH5)

Preap made a frank assessment of what he saw as the limitations of volunteers more generally for narrow, highly technical tasks, which he says were better suited to consultants. He saw a very specific middle role that volunteers filled well in a complementary manner with local expertise. He reiterated the sort of generalist niche Brian, the European technical adviser, mentioned earlier.

You know our limitation, technical skills, language skills, so we cannot do without outside support on some specific tasks. We need international consultants or regional consultants, with good experience and skill in the field. For some tasks you don’t need that, so there is something in between that a volunteer can fill. It’s not a necessity that a volunteer has a higher level. This can always be complementary, with local expertise here. (CAMH5)

Sok, another Cambodian host working with FAO and supervising a volunteer, reinforced the useful volunteer contribution to policy which he says was feasible because of the volunteers’ strong field experience.

To have a full knowledge of field issues very much contributes to her work at the policy level. I think this is a kind of contributory element, she has a very strong background from the field and that facilitates her participation in her policy consultation and contribution. (CAMH6)

He also commented on the collaboration of other IVCO volunteers in project work FAO is involved with on the Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project (TSEMP) and the bridging role the volunteers could provide with the various members of the project implementing unit (CAMH6).

The combination of this bridging role with the capacity development work of volunteers was crucial. It meant individuals, and even more importantly institutions, could be strategically focussed on their long term needs. It also was a cautionary message for those who suggest volunteers can only be successful within projects. Clearly there also needed to be volunteers in broader linking roles that encouraged the synergy of
collaborative action. This was acknowledged by the ACIAR representative quoted earlier saying projects also gain indirectly from having volunteers in departments and other institutions, linking and building capacity broadly, not just within individual projects or towards narrow ‘deliverables’ or outcomes alone.

The importance of policy influence as well as building bridges among stakeholders on the Tonle Sap Environmental Management Project was also identified as key by John, the IVCO field staff member (CAMI1).

*There needs to be a lot more accountability and ... working within the service providers themselves in Cambodia. ...to look at building the capacity of the individuals within the service providers, but also their overall organisation needs to be strengthened. ... It is very ad hoc at the moment, project based, and we need to help the NGOs and the government, not be pushed from pillar to post by way of the funding needs. We can help by just strengthening the organisations and the individuals within those organisations to be able to negotiate with donors and to be able to write proposals that fit in with their [own] strategy.* (CAMI1)

The bridging role of the IVCO is often described as a programmatic one aiming to be more strategic by focusing on specific sectors like education, health or environment and strengthening the complementary individual and institutional roles within these. This is also not easy given volunteers are not line managed by VSO but the local organisations they serve. It also needs more resourcing from the IVCO and challenges to some extent the autonomy of volunteers as well as the accountability to individual organisations, unless they are all under one sectoral government ministry for example (as was the case with VSO volunteers in fisheries in Cambodia for example). These were the dilemmas Bill Armstrong raised earlier and they are reiterated by VSO staff member Mathew, noting the trade off between individual agency and team work in a programmatic approach.

*It requires more resourcing....It’s harder to coordinate, harder to develop placements which are coherent as you put them together. ...and requires people who are actually individual actors in some ways, because they are not line managed by VSO and they are very weakly managed within their,
However, there are obvious strategic development advantages to this programmatic approach, which is why it has become more common among IVCOs. It does however mean being genuinely locally responsible and accountable is more difficult (though VSO’s three way partnership review is a way to counter this) in addition to taking away some of the volunteers individual autonomy. One IVCO officer admitted they could not go back, but that the program approach did mean they could not respond to most specific individual requests anymore (CAMI3).

Jim, an NGO country director of international NGO OXFAM working in Cambodia in the livelihoods area including community fisheries, highlighted the difference he has seen international volunteers make in a government department. He also acknowledged the difficulties of working in the government sector and hence the risk of it not working out – but the significant long term benefits when it did (CAMO4).

Natalie, a returned volunteer still working in Cambodia after her placement, highlighted the way volunteers could complement at a lower and more capacity development focused level, the important higher level role of other development players at the ministerial level. Natalie explained volunteers did not come in with the ‘fanfare’ of other TA that comes in at a higher level. As a result, it took longer to achieve things by building capacity from below. She saw however the importance of someone at a higher level, who could for example challenge the minister in a way she could not. She said however this high level work left a ‘very hollow basis underneath’ without the lower level capacity development that gives people the confidence to express themselves in their departments as well as to the higher level TA experts. Because of this, she said the
different roles and levels are complementary (CAMRV1).

Natalie differentiated the roles of the volunteer from a technical consultant in terms of what is expected and required of each as well as the appropriate balance both could achieve together. It gave a sense of the efficiency, in a complementary way of having the more relaxed interaction of a volunteer with other TA ‘experts’ (CAMRV1).

In summary, long term international volunteers were recognised for their complementary and strategic roles with other development players. This fits with the IVCO civil society roles discussed in Chapter Four and is linked to three main elements of bridging, capacity development and local accountability and independence as follows.

1. Their bridging roles helped facilitate better connections and networks internally within host organisations as well as externally among a range of actors working in related areas. The bridging role was at times informal and at times formal to the extent of even being written into Memorandum of Understanding with donors and other stakeholders. While there was some evident questioning of volunteers working more directly within official aid and even commercial organisations delivering projects for contracts, there was also recognition that the volunteers provided something subtly different and complementary compared to labels of simply cheap TA.

2. Linked to their bridging role was their contribution to capacity development by providing a subtly different role to other forms of technical assistance with less emphasis on deliverables and external resources and greater emphasis on relationship building and strengthening skills at lower levels. This provided a
more stable base, support and stimulus for change, improvement and collaboration at higher levels.

3. The bridging and capacity development roles were linked to a respect for the perceived broader accountability and greater independence of volunteers which allowed them to monitor, stimulate and challenge the overall progress of different stakeholders from the starting point of reference within a local host institution. This provided a reality check for more distant/removed stakeholders about the real limitations and struggles local organisations had to deal with as well as potentially an informal monitoring for donors. However, this might be negatively seen as a donor watchdog role but could be tempered by the fact that volunteers were also seen to contribute to developing the capacity and confidence of their organisations and colleagues to question and advocate for their own concerns and needs to donors and other influential players. Volunteers were also acknowledged as closer to reality because of their local living and working conditions and this meant they were genuinely respected for their assessments of local conditions, constraints and capacities.

**Capacity development contribution**

Capacity development emerged as an important and recognised contribution of volunteers by non-volunteer stakeholders that confirms volunteers’ interest and involvement discussed in Chapter Five. ACIAR has a strong focus on capacity development and in the past had not placed Australian personnel in the field for long periods but saw by contrast the benefits of doing this through volunteers. The emphasis on capacity development also highlights the fact that money alone is not sufficient for nurturing development as was recognised in Chapter Three in the discussion about the best chance of meeting the MDGs and this is reflected in this section by assessments of an NGO representative and former volunteer. Capacity development is also recognised
as something that requires not just technical focus but also a networking orientation as demonstrated by the role for volunteers in country as well as on their return to their home country. What capacity development can mean in practice is further explained by one government volunteer supervisor who describes the volunteer’s contribution in his department. Finally the capacity development role of international volunteers is evidenced by a local Oxfam representative and the experience of a former volunteer who was asked to stay on by the world bank to do the same capacity development work she was doing as a volunteer in a government ministry.

ACIAR has a strong capacity development and partnership focus and because of that had traditionally chosen not to have Australian scientists in the field. They made a distinction with volunteers however and encouraged them to join their projects. Tim at ACIAR says the volunteer mode of working alongside and learning is different hence it did not contradict the policy and helped facilitate capacity development. Tim explained:

*Why we do it with volunteers is about the difference. That people would be working with them. And of course, for the volunteers, we recognise it’s a learning experience for them also.* (AUS01)

Central American NGO representative Tomás noted the capacity development role volunteers can play that his agency could not achieve simply through providing finances. He said the volunteer style, by giving a glimpse of an outsider’s view, could open spaces in the mind of people that simply funding projects could not achieve (CA29O). This resonated with the returned volunteer who said in the section that discussed ‘learning’ as a volunteer characteristic, that he learned from his volunteer experience that solving poverty was much more complex than just providing money (CAM RV2).
Tomás compared the mechanical roll out of many projects with the capacity
development of individuals he knew who worked alongside volunteers. That gave those
local campesinos (poor farmers) the skills and confidence to operate in the higher level
spaces of donor relations, negotiation and advocacy that he operates in as a development
NGO representative (CA29O).

Anna, a Cambodian NGO director, spoke of her positive experience with the AYAD
program and the importance of the volunteers developing capacity by working to local
reality and requirements and alongside local staff, not ‘over them’ as experts (CAMO3).

A Cambodian government official Preap described the volunteer niche as gaining
experience and strengthening local capacity. For example, he highlighted developing
confidence for negotiating at a meeting, as something that Cambodian officials needed
to be able to do in discussion with donors and other international representatives. This
included practical matters like, lateral thinking, listening and putting a view or
clarifying other’s views. In other words, he said, Natalie had not so much transferred
high level technical skills as given a deeper understanding of processes of
communication to achieve their goals. This was quite explicitly valuing capacity
development over purely technical advice, though an understanding of both was clearly
critical and evident in the reports from Natalie and her supervisor presented here and
elsewhere (CAMH5).

Jim, the Oxfam director in Cambodia, gave more practical examples of volunteer-
supported capacity development that strengthened the government and NGO
organisations where they were based.

*There have been some very good VSO placements with the community
fisheries office.…There are AVI volunteers with a couple of partners that we*
They helped set up an NGO based in Battambang which we support still. Part of the strength of that organisation is from the fact that they had the support of volunteers to start with. (CAMO4)

One example of recognition of the volunteer capacity development role was when Natalie finished her volunteer contract and was approached by the World Bank who wanted to support her to continue the work (CAMRV1).

To conclude, organisations that explicitly valued capacity development at an organisational level (for example UNDP, OXFAM and ACIAR) explicitly encouraged the use of volunteers in their work because they saw the synergy in the role. Volunteers were seen as fitting well for example because of their specific mandate to not just transfer skills but also to learn and develop relationships. These attributes were valued as elements not easily achievable by funding conventional projects. Non volunteer stakeholders valued the volunteer contribution because of their involvement with locally accountable, paced and adaptable processes that could be very practical and specific for example in terms of strengthening communication. Evidence of this recognition by stakeholders was exemplified by many examples through this thesis including for example the OXFAM country manager who saw the direct contribution of volunteers in capacity development because of the consolidated strength of a fledgling NGO to liaise with government departments.

**Responding to local needs and seeing local reality**

One of the key elements identified for a successful volunteer assignment was the local request that responded to local needs (of organisations and communities) as exemplified below from an Australian technical organisation ACIAR and local Central American NGOs. By really living with the local reality volunteers could understand the local context in a way that those who did not physically know it just could not. Moreover, volunteers within a local organisation could adapt to the changing reality the
organisation might face and could respond dynamically. An Australian Embassy Representative said Australian volunteers respond mainly to Cambodian preferences and only to a lesser extent Australian ones, and that they provided useful insights into the local reality, though officials did not tap into this knowledge as much as they could.

Tim, the ACIAR worker, recognised the most successful ACIAR volunteer placements as those that really fitted local needs because in-country people defined the skills required and put the request to the volunteer agency. He acknowledged however the gap at times between an interest in having a volunteer and actually putting in a request for one! This could be judged as an indicator of local ownership for the idea of a volunteer over the usual attraction of gaining funds—not a motivator in this case (AUSO1).

Diego, Honduran director of NGO and volunteer host FOCOD, spoke of how they expected their volunteer to fit the local strategic needs and apply their expertise directly to that. This provided a powerful synergy for responding to the reality of the communities the NGO worked with, and doing so used the expertise of the volunteer and the NGO.

For an organisation such as FOCOD and perhaps others, the idea is to carefully structure how they come, their role, what their contributions are going to be in terms of the...existing [organisational] strategies. We see how they settle in and contribute to that strategy, how to really support the community, drawing directly on their own expertise. That’s how they start to fit in and in keeping with their strengths and our own abilities we work together. (CA28H)

Jennifer, the donor representative in Central America, explicitly stated the essential importance for development practitioners in practical on the ground experience and

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77 Para una organización como es el FOCOD y quizás otros mas el propósito es la formalización de cómo viene, sus funciones, cual va a ser su contribución en función de las …estratégicas que hay y ver como se inserta y contribuye a ese planteamiento como realmente apoyar la parte comunitaria entendiendo realmente eso de la especialización del trabajo. Así se acopla y de acuerdo a esas fortalezas de él y las habilidades nuestras vamos trabajando conjuntamente (CA28H).
understanding and the weight her agency gave in recruitment to former volunteers because of that (CA20D).

Carmen, the Central American NGO director and volunteer host, again highlighted the characteristics of Sophia who she termed an ideal volunteer because she could use her own initiative while adapting and responding to the agenda of the local organisation as well as its assessment of the community’s specific needs where they worked.

She...has a talent for...analysing and understanding the communities and the needs of the Foundation....in actual fact they [the volunteers] have to show their own initiative and they need to be focused on the structure...and the needs of the organisation. Because we have already done community consultations and know what the needs of the community are...and where we can help them. (CA30H)

A Nicaraguan NGO director (Glenda) spoke of how a volunteer (Paul) really deeply knew the reality of the people connected with an initiative her agency supports, because ‘he lived it’ with them (CA22). She compared this with her relations with some large Development Banks that work at a distance from the community whereas the volunteer visits them and not just “in and out” for a meeting but often staying several days to ascertain the problems and work with locals on them (CA22).

A Cambodian NGO director Anna highlighted the greater flexibility of international volunteers to be able to adapt what they do to the pace, changing circumstances and needs of local organisations rather than outside goals.

A lot of the aid projects are outward oriented and you have to produce this and you have to do that. When, if you step back a little, a lot of people say, well it takes a while to understand. It takes a while in gaining trust amongst and actually, ‘capacity building’ is this big term now....you can’t always fit it on this schedule so, I think that international volunteers, need to come

78 Ella...tiene ese talento de... de analizar y conocer muy bien lo que es las comunidades y la necesidad de la fundación….de hecho pues tienen que tener iniciativa propia y tienen que estar enfocados en la estructura...de las necesidades de la organización. Porque nosotros ya hemos hecho consultas comunitarias y sabemos cuáles son las necesidades de las comunidades...y donde podemos ayudarle (CA30H).
Julia, an Australian Embassy Representative, said she compared the ‘on show’ view embassy staff see compared to the valuable and unique insights into Cambodian reality that volunteers like the Australian Youth Ambassadors get. She lamented however that the knowledge is not better utilised by the embassy.

> Sometimes at government to government level you see things at their best. [Youth] ambassadors see things as they are often and that does give them pretty unique insights for good and bad into Cambodia and the way Cambodia runs....I sometimes feel that the store of knowledge that the youth ambassadors and vols have, we don't necessarily tap into as much as we could as an embassy. (CAMO5)

The embassy representative saw the Australian values and character demonstrated through the way the volunteers work—not imposing but working with people to solve their own problems (CAMO5).

One donor technical officer, Brian, reflected on what he heard from a volunteer over coffee and their experiential insights into the genuine local constraints that he did not experience.

> Mary would come in here and have coffee “I don’t know how they do anything down there.” You know, “I don’t know how the decisions are made...They have no resources. There is nothing.” You know, so an understanding of quite why things don’t work. Yeah, Mary had a much better understanding than we would ever have. (CAMD3)

As Maria, a Honduran government Officer who worked with volunteer Sofia said, volunteers develop a new understanding and conscience about the reality of life in the South that they not only work on there but can also take back to their own country to help change global structures from there (CA57O).
This section has reflected the views of non-volunteer stakeholders that volunteers did indeed respond to local needs and requests as well as getting a first hand lived experience of the local reality. This was demonstrated in four areas.

1. International volunteers were regarded as working best when they fulfilled their organisational process of fitting a local organisational request with an appropriately skilled volunteer.

2. Volunteers were regarded as seeing the local reality closer than most international development staff because they generally worked within local organisations under local conditions and also lived in the local community in modest ways so they were not shielded from local realities. Because of their closeness to local people and organisations they were particularly conscious of the obstacles as well as strengths of local contexts. They were acutely aware of local resource restraints and what could be achieved with them and were seen as being able to take that knowledge back to their country of origin to influence policy and practices there that could affect countries of the South.

3. Volunteers were seen as bringing their initiative and creativity to the local context and were seen as adapting by using these in the framework provided by their local host as well as the communities and individuals they worked with.

4. Volunteer close contact with grassroots realities was seen as contrasting with larger institutions like development banks or bilateral agencies. Such agencies do not have the same opportunities or time to venture into such real and at times remote contexts. Moreover even when they did get the opportunity, it was often in a formal setting where it was hard to experience the real grassroots people and realities because of ‘diplomatic’ considerations and constraints on both sides. The window to this reality could enhance credibility and effectiveness for volunteers, their hosts and other stakeholders because of the practical
contribution involved.

**Summary**

This section looked at non volunteer stakeholder recognition in three key areas starting with whether international volunteering for development was accepted as making a development contribution or whether it was just considered cross cultural exchange. This reflected the way volunteering is considered as not fitting the way some key actors may define development. However despite this, there was a field recognition (by field staff at times from the same institutions) of volunteers’ specific contributions. For example their capacity development work was built on close association with local people, their realities and needs. This provided a particularly useful if complex and vulnerable opportunity to provide a genuinely complementary and strategic addition to other forms of development cooperation and technical assistance. In this way capacity development provided a practical and conceptual way of breaking down what has at times been seen as a dichotomy between the cross cultural exchange and development dimensions.

Specific volunteer roles were regarded as contributing but not limited to just ‘development as practice’. The cross cultural exchange tag could be acknowledged as having importance in its own right as well as fitting Ellerman’s (2004, 2005) idea of autonomy respecting and ‘indirect’ assistance; or development as vision, historical process and practice (Thomas, 2000); and a relational view of development (Becker, et al., 1999:6; Eyben, 2008; Slife, 2004). Part of international volunteers’ special role was seen as their local accountability combined with an ability to show independence and initiative with support from an IVCO framework.
The term ‘cross cultural’ implies a relational view of development and/or a view of efficient or effective development that seeks to know the local context better as an instrumental tool to achieve specific development ends. Volunteers were noted for being locally requested and accountable rather than imposed by donor packages with associated ‘outward accountability’. A tension was presented in this regard with the increasing tendency to place volunteers within projects or programs (with externally driven deliverables), hence placing some stress on the strength of volunteers’ independence and local line management—a strong part of the IVCO general operating principle. This tension was partially balanced by the bridging/liaison advocacy role between different development players and particularly on behalf of local hosts. Volunteers were also noted for their closeness to local realities in work and living conditions, which gave them special insights that larger organisations lacked because of the more formal nature of their relationships. This very local view was seen at times as obscuring a broader supposedly more objective view that other institutions with more formal roles and greater distance from local people and structures have. What was seen as countering the potential weakness of this position was the relative independence, local accountability and understanding the local niche enabled. This allowed for a unique role for volunteers in capacity development. One that was not just about ‘deliverables’ but builds bridges informally or even formally, within and across organisations at the same time as advocating with different actors from local staff and hosts, to donors and governments.

Therefore there was recognition of volunteering as different. This provided space and impetus for either disregarding it as inappropriate or ineffective in development OR embracing it as something with great complementary potential. There clearly was genuine recognition of volunteers by hosts, governments, donors and even commercial
aid contractors. They all expressed, in different ways, that volunteers did not fit the
norm but have value exactly because of their different contribution. Projects for
example are keen to resource volunteers as, for them, the best way for them to be
effective. Aid agencies wanted to have volunteers fit donor goals first and local
organisational goals second – but they still accepted that while, and perhaps because
volunteers did not fit the normal TA role in many of their core characteristics, they had
particular complementary value through their institutional and capacity development
and bridging roles. These contributions fit the trans-national civil society social learning

**Conclusion**

This chapter presented the insights from non volunteer stakeholders on the three central
research questions. I will outline here the key insights from each question and then
provide a few pointers for how these other stakeholders’ views differ from volunteer
stakeholders’ views and link all issues to the thesis overall.

**What features characterise the role of international volunteers?**

The characteristics identified by non volunteers provide a surprising amount of common
ground with volunteers in general about the perceptions of their own roles. What was
particularly interesting was the high priority placed by other stakeholders on the soft
skills and relational elements of the volunteer role. This was exemplified firstly by the
number one ranking for accompaniment rather than simply technical skills or practical
impact. However, there was clear recognition that elements like volunteer
accompaniment and accompanying attributes like personal aspects, relationship
building, embrace of cross cultural understanding and the learning that exemplified,
were genuine and useful contributors to successful development and capacity
development work. This was despite a feeling that on their own or in isolation these
elements could detract or divert resources or priority from successful development interventions. The different volunteer role was exemplified to some extent by the category of volunteers lacking resources and power. While at one level this could be seen as frustrating for the volunteer or a wasted resource by some project managers or donors, it clearly opened up particular opportunities not only for local ownership and direction setting but also for personal agency by determined and passionate volunteers.

Is it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers, and/or others as a result of the work together?

The features identified as characteristic of the international volunteer role provide significant recognition for their practical relevance beyond simply being interesting and categories from other aid players when seen together. Volunteers were seen as fitting in with local direction and only gradually developing a role in some joint decision making in keeping with their expertise and local respect and acceptance. This provided a different power relationship and level of ownership compared to the project interventions that provide funds or withhold them from local institutions as ways of ensuring compliance with donor goals. The IVCO facilitated nature of volunteer placements also ensured that structurally local hosts had the power to request and reject volunteers who did not fit their own goals. Volunteers were noted as playing diverse roles at different levels in the institutions where they worked. These diverse roles allowed work at different levels from the field to the policy level and bringing the learnings from both levels to the institution as a whole. This was seen as an unusual and particularly valid contribution.
How are international volunteers recognised in the development sector?

Compared to volunteer and IVCO perceptions, volunteers were surprisingly well appreciated by other stakeholders in the development sector ranging from volunteer host organisations to donors and observers. While volunteers saw potential here, most other players saw real and genuine collaboration as fruitful and happening though more was welcomed. The soft skills and engagement of volunteers reflected in the characteristics section were also clearly identified as contributing to a successful capacity development role for volunteers.
Chapter 7: Conclusions

In September 2010 The United Nations General Assembly will be considering how to ‘keep the promise’ (United Nations General Assembly, 2010) to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 with an agreed action agenda at the same time as foreshadowing the process for after 2015. At the same time the annual UNDP Human Development Report will celebrate 20 years of measuring human development and shaping and provoking international reflection on how it is understood. Its focus will include recommendations ‘for a new development agenda’ (United Nations Development Programme, 2010a). These milestones along with “Beijing + 15” also form a launch pad for UNDP’s Platform HD2010 to engage diverse “non state actors, including civil society those at the community level and representing marginalised groups, in articulating a new vision of multilateralism that is anchored in human development and inclusive participation” (United Nations Development Programme, 2010c). This provides a timely consideration of the contribution of international volunteering to development thinking and practice. One thoughtful book captures the opportunity to take a new path: After 2015: International Development Policy at a Crossroads (Sumner & Tiwari, 2009).

As Cliff Alum (2007) says:

In reality, the influence of the poverty reduction development agenda is paramount. But this may itself come under pressure as we approach 2015 and the MDGs are not met. Mobilising the collective energy of people, the practical consequences of global citizenship, may emerge as increasingly important. The increased prominence of the public engagement objectives may well be supplemented by models of building active global citizenship throughout the international volunteering programmes. (p. 16)
This final chapter will first review the results of this research and how it fits that policy context. It begins by revisiting the relational paradigm as a basis for the new development agenda. It then considers this against the findings of this research in terms of the role of volunteers, the shifts in thinking and practice by volunteers and those they work with, and finally the recognition of international volunteers. It will then revisit the idea of volunteers as imperialists in contrast to how volunteers can demonstrate accompaniment, agency, ownership and letting go. Next the chapter considers how volunteering for development might be further investigated and considered as part of what the Institute of Development Studies (2010) calls ‘reimagining development’ in the light of the contemporary global development context and renewed efforts to achieve the MDGs. This provides a basis for considering what international volunteers can contribute to a rethinking of current conceptions of development. The chapter concludes with some recommendations and personal reflections.

The research aimed to investigate the characteristics, contribution and recognition of long term international volunteers in development and sustainability thinking and practice. The new consensus on development provides an ideal context to ascertain the appropriateness of international volunteers for development and sustainability. The research in this thesis, and particularly Chapter Six, gives weight to the view that the specific characteristics of international volunteering give it a unique and complementary contribution to make to development that is increasingly recognised by official development institutions and other development stakeholders.

**An alternative relational paradigm for development**

The dominant development practice has been focussed on technical assistance and based on a ‘linear outcome-oriented perspective’ (Hinton & Groves, 2004:5). It has emphasised resource transfer, poverty reduction and growth rather than equality, justice
and sustainability. These may not be mutually exclusive depending on how they are tackled.

The historical dichotomy between a focus on development and a focus on the environment remains a continuing struggle that is understandable but necessary to bridge. Sustainability provides a framework for this, demonstrating the complex interconnections and interdependence that can provide constructive reciprocal benefits rather than just win-lose scenarios. The global climate change crisis makes this recognition imperative for our very planetary survival and also gives us an opportunity to address global injustice and over-consumption by the North. Sustainability can provide a framework for a more collaborative approach to science and knowledge that cultivates civic science in its broadest sense. Skilled citizens sharing their experiences across borders can encourage the combination of wisdom, knowledge and experience from experts and communities toward mutually agreed goals. Such a combination means people can play transformational not just instrumental roles which encourage ownership, personal empowerment and agency. International volunteers can model these processes and provide a new impetus to tackle the global environmental and development issues of our day.

There is now a clear mainstream consensus on the major problems with conventional forms of development, particularly through technical assistance. In the late 2000’s, the OECD (OECD, 2009a, 2009c) and the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness evaluations (E. D. Stern, et al., 2008; Wood, et al., 2008) brought these critiques again to world attention. The new framework acclaimed by the Paris Principles demonstrates the relevance of a broader relational approach to development. These principles were
amply portrayed by the work of long term international volunteers for development and sustainability documented in this thesis.

The shortcomings of technical assistance have given rise to the development of new approaches like capacity development, which tries to bring local ownership to the fore but can be widened to allow emphasis on ‘learning with’ rather than ‘training of’ or ‘teaching to’. These new directions for development highlight the value of the connections and relationships between people and what they do and why. This is the basis of a relational view of development.

Reflections by volunteers and other stakeholders on volunteer work show the merit of Ellerman’s (2005) ‘indirect approach’ to development which lends itself to an embrace of culture and its embeddedness in development. This means not just using cross cultural sensitivity as an instrumental tool to achieve development goals but instead having a relational view of development that explicitly reveals its value base (Rao & Walton, 2004). The deepening value base may in fact be something that cannot only help tackle what Ellerman (2005) describes as the conundrum of “assisted self reliance” in the South, but also to tame the consumer culture of the North in favour instead of a quality of life that encourages ‘prosperity without growth’ (Tim Jackson, 2009). Here the South has much to teach the North and trans-national civil society has a humanising and productive bridging and learning role to play in the development process, as I discussed in Chapters Three and Four, and the IVCOs facilitation of international volunteers is one important contributor to this transformative role. In this sense international volunteering provides a model for the mutuality of learning through the new understanding the international volunteer carries back home which can translate into positive social behaviour towards the global commons.
International volunteers can also provide a public face for development and an important vehicle for civic science by situating technical and scientific knowledge in the relational community domain where people accompany each other rather than simply transferring knowledge or solutions. This contextualised people-centred cultivation of knowledge and experience is central to the relational approach to development and shows that volunteers should be considered a valid and relevant contributor that can complement other more conventional development interventions. More than that, however, they can be seen as helping reconceptualise development as relational.

**Role of international volunteers in development**

The research looked at the roles and attributes of long term international volunteers as articulated by volunteers and other stakeholders, including IVCOs, volunteer hosts and observers. There was a surprising degree of convergence in their views, despite different interpretations of what they meant for volunteer work and effectiveness. The different interpretations are explained and moderated to some degree by what different development actors regard value in the ‘development as practice’ or broader relational development vision.

There are two very clear conclusions that can be drawn from interviews with non volunteer stakeholders (with slightly different levels of priority among different sub-groups) about the following key common characteristics of long term international volunteers:

- **Accompaniment** of local people and organisations came out as the main role of international volunteers as expressed by non volunteers and volunteer hosts. This is key because it contextualises the valued technical and practical contributions that volunteers make, explicitly within a relational frame. In other
words, what volunteers could do was explicitly shaped by what local people were already thinking and doing. Complementary with this relational framework was acknowledgement of the importance of volunteers’ motivations, values and ideas, personal aspects, relationships, and learning by volunteers and those they worked with, which emphasised mutual benefit and change over simply knowledge transfer. A fundamental facilitator of these relational aspects is the way that international volunteers live and work alongside local people under local or similar conditions, which encourages an explicit embrace of the cross cultural context and issues.

- **Accountability** of volunteers first to their (mostly local) host organisations, followed by themselves and the volunteer facilitator or IVCO was crucial. This local accountability is difficult and rare in development practice as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness evaluations show (OECD, 2009c; E. D. Stern, et al., 2008; Wood, et al., 2008) and so processes that can model this are very valuable for analysis and implementation. Local accountability of volunteers also provides an ideal opportunity to cultivate local ownership, another fundamental basis of the Paris Declaration Principles and the ‘default principles for capacity development’ (Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; OECD, 2006b). At one level, this local accountability can mean volunteers lack the power and resources to achieve change through conditionality (for example via funding that is withheld until change is implemented). Volunteers expressed a sense of powerlessness because of this and their reliance on local processes and systems to achieve key objectives. At another level, volunteers demonstrated an unusual authority by virtue of their varying place in the hierarchy of the host organisation. They worked potentially with management on policy and procedures as well as with communities and individuals at the practical
grassroots level. This facilitated a contribution to long term, gradual and systemic change as well as capacity development, ownership and practical on the ground improvement. Being part of a local institution also put them in a quite unique and subtly persuasive position to build bridges between and within different development players from government institutions to donors, NGOs and technical assistance providers.

**Shifts in thinking and practice**

As a result of their working together was it possible to achieve shifts in thinking and practice for the volunteers and/or others?

Based on evidence from the experience of all stakeholders consulted as part of the research, the actual contribution of international volunteers relating to practical, attitudinal and behavioural changes varies depending on the context. It was reflected most explicitly by process issues although the broader issues are evident in an integrated way throughout the thesis as evidence of the way volunteers were characterised and recognised. Because of the way volunteers operated, their contributions were actually invisible and difficult to attribute when a true community development approach was employed. The diversity of views demonstrated in the research may also be partly explained by how development goals and outcomes are conceived, controlled and shaped by different stakeholders. There is:

- A clear and widespread recognition that because of greater local accountability of the volunteers, there is more opportunity for **local direction setting** initially and then joint decision making as volunteers gain trust and understanding. This is different to the common project framework where most accountability has been up to the donor. Agreements such as the Paris Declaration are trying to change this. The local direction setting of the volunteers’ work focus can be difficult for the volunteer who must first earn respect and only then may gain an
opportunity to contribute to decision making compared to someone higher in the hierarchy or someone able to provide conditional financial incentives. At the same time the volunteer may be subject to a lack of strong local supervision and support, at least in the short term, which can be frustrating and isolating for the volunteer. It also can lead to other stronger development players having a larger effect on the volunteer work agenda when they have the opportunity to more quickly provide a valued niche for an apparently ‘underutilised resource’. The positive side of this local accountability is that, though slower and more difficult, there can be greater ownership for the volunteers’ contribution to a more genuinely local agenda via accompaniment.

- Common recognition that volunteers operate at **varied levels** within the institutions where they work can be interpreted as either negative or positive. On the negative side, there can be ambiguity and lack of ‘structural’ authority in the organisational hierarchy, which complicates the volunteer role. On the positive side, the lack of a predominant role at any one level in the organisational hierarchy frequently allows volunteers, when they have earned the trust of supervisors and work colleagues to work at both the grassroots and policy levels with each informing the other. The volunteers had relative independence as outsiders, facilitated by their IVCO and yet were primarily responsible to the local organisation. Because they were generally highly motivated and skilled, they were in a position to play an advocacy role that was unusually independent while being strongly locally connected. As a result, they were acutely aware of the local context and its constraints and opportunities.

**Recognition of international volunteers**

Recognition of the value of international volunteers in the development sector was higher than anticipated by either IVCOs or the volunteers themselves.
Broad indications from the research are that despite subtle and perhaps historical negative stereotypes, there is very positive recognition of the worthwhile role of international volunteers in development. Nevertheless more specific research is needed to develop deeper insights into this area.

**Complementary contributions** of volunteers alongside other aid actors were seen as key by most stakeholders. To some extent there was criticism and a narrow interpretation of the opportunities of volunteers to make a significant difference given their individually limited resources and power. To a large extent however, this attitude seems to be a result of different conceptions of who should manage the efficient use of the volunteer expertise. It questions who volunteers should be accountable to (for example local institutions, international projects/institutions, themselves, or a combination of these) and what time frames are required to achieve change and how. Linked to this ambiguity is further lack of clarity about what are key development goals and meanings at an overarching level as well as within a specific context. In other words are development goals aimed at just ‘doing development’ or ‘development as practice’ or ownership and mutual accountability and alignment with in country priorities as per the new aid paradigm and all five Paris Declaration Principles.

The potential **disjuncture over accountability** was reflected in the 1995 Finnish Review (I. Wilson & Nooter, 1995) and 2004 MS Review (Chr Michelsen Institute, 2004) statements about volunteers doing good work that is not necessarily in line with donor government aid priorities. This is a key issue and the research demonstrates how different approaches to
development can be broadly complementary without necessarily reflecting the same narrow or short term objectives of specific institutions. There are clear parallels here with the development NGO sector. It has fought long and hard on the issue of using different mediums and processes than governments and multilaterals to work toward overarching and broadly agreed development goals like the MDGs, even if NGOs also want to go further and deeper and at times act more politically.

This civil society link came frustratingly late to the Paris Declaration deliberations that started with only high level actors like governments and multilateral agencies. The new recognition reflected in the work of the Civil Society working group, the UNDP HD2010 Platform, the 2009 OECD report on “Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness” and recognition in the OECD “Progress Report on Implementing the Paris Declaration” are heartening in this regard (Advisory Group on Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness, 2007; OECD, 2009a, 2009b; United Nations Development Programme, 2010c). The current thesis findings are an appropriate reminder that independent IVCOs and international volunteers are part of trans-national civil society that also works through or with other mediums, including governments, community movements, NGOs, the corporate sector, the UN and other multilateral agencies. As a result, it is a very appropriate bridging medium for consolidating work on the Paris Principles and moving beyond them with the help of trans-national civil society.
The specific capacity development role of international volunteers highlights the importance of **capacity development as a reciprocal process** where learning, change and development are important for all development actors not just traditional recipients of aid. This helps to bridge the nature and distance of the power relationship noted by Li (2007) because volunteers live and work under local conditions and constraints alongside local people and accountable to local institutions, regardless of their high level technical skills.

Linked to the idea of ‘accountability to who’ is the interplay between the notion of ‘development as practice’ and the broader, more reciprocal and relational view. Most stakeholders acknowledged the real benefits of the broader **bridging/networking and relational roles** volunteers can provide. An example of this was the suggestion that volunteers provided a reminder of the way everyone in development should be learning and benefiting. In this study, local government officials in Cambodia clearly articulated the benefit of having long term volunteers accompanying local staff and hence complementing the work of higher level technical experts who could not play the same capacity development role because of their more limited time periods and focus on high level consultations and short term results.

Volunteers are seen as **responding to local needs and reality** and providing a vantage point for other more formal official development institutions to understand better this raw reality. The volunteer’s experience is within real local contexts and institutions and as a result they see the difficulties as well as the inspired and dedicated responses of many local actors that are less visible in their detail to the outsider.
Volunteers and imperialism or social change

There is also an increasing and explicit involvement of IVCOs in official or commercial aid projects that highlight the questions that were always present about the potential of volunteers to be elitist imperialists furthering state interests (Brav, et al., 2002). These claims should be even more openly discussed now because of the more common and specific involvement of international volunteers in development projects run by or funded by not just government aid agencies or NGOs but commercial companies, development banks or multilateral agencies (or a combination of these). The range of volunteer hosts witnessed in the research, from NGOs in the Central American Environmental Vulnerability Program to government departments, UN agencies and commercial contractors on bilateral projects in Cambodia is evidence of this. However also clear is that there is a less than stereotypical and homogeneous implication of who most influences the volunteer agenda because of the three way accountability between IVCO, local partner and volunteers themselves. This makes volunteers not totally beholden to their main host and line manager the local partner organisation, a donor, or the IVCO, which facilitates and supports an assignment in line with its own ethos or at times pragmatic concerns or directives. Nor are volunteers just carried along by their own whims or motivations because the volunteer, host and IVCO have complementary influence though the strength of any one may hold more sway at particular times in the volunteer placement. At the same time, the volunteer is personally responsible and motivated and can resist or embrace elements of the framework that the funder, IVCO or the local host provides depending on the circumstances they find themselves in. This can provide an opportunity for significant constructive personal agency or, as one host observer said, ‘personal destruction’ when local structure and direction is lacking or dampens the volunteer’s expertise and enthusiasm. This human vulnerability can be intensely frustrating and challenging (as well as rewarding). Combined with living under more locally equivalent working and lifestyle conditions, it can also help facilitate
local relationships and trust that may otherwise be much harder to cultivate. The fact that volunteers felt they often had little power and resources to make a significant difference is certainly in contrast to the perceptions of an imperialist volunteer role. Indeed volunteers’ accompaniment of local people and organisations at times put them at odds with existing power structures and provided an alternate model for gaining local ownership. This is taken up in more detail in the next section.

**Accompaniment, agency, ownership and ‘letting go’**

The most surprising element in the interviews with non-volunteer stakeholders detailed in Chapter Six was their recognition of similar themes to those the volunteers raised. Despite some indications of a very pragmatic and results orientation among hosts and donors, there was in fact a strong recognition of the relational aspects like the accompaniment role and the importance of personal aspects, individual autonomy and independence that volunteers could demonstrate.

There was an interesting divergence between the donors and project manager hosts’ understanding of these aspects and their questioning of how people, without the resources provided by a project, could really make a difference. This apparent lack of recognition of the importance of genuine local control to cultivate ownership in a broader long term capacity development sense was intriguing. However while it was not surprising given the history of development and technical assistance endeavours discussed in Chapter Three, it is clear now that an emphasis on quick results and control are sure killers of local ownership, initiative and independence, supporting Ellerman’s (2005) indirect strategy to autonomy respecting assistance. The relevance of this strategy is only made more pertinent by the Paris Principles evaluation critiques (Wood, et al., 2008).
The results of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness evaluation show the challenge for most donors in ‘letting go’ (Wood, et al., 2008, p. 9). To be able to let go requires depth in relations and trust. This is exemplified by the views expressed by volunteer hosts and development observers that local accountability of volunteers was significant and useful, including for example, in the difficult work of accompaniment and capacity development in Southern government departments. A good example of this was one that the Cambodian Oxfam representative noted: the difference between a local organisation employing an international volunteer and the local organisation getting support from a Cambodian worker employed by Oxfam. However, a series of Cambodian government and Central American NGO observers also confirmed this view. Its relevance is reiterated by a recent UNDP/UNEP manual (2009) on mainstreaming poverty-environment linkages which highlights the crucial importance of working with governments not just NGOs—despite the challenges and this is something IVCOS have long experience with.

The next section considers more explicitly where to from here and builds on the positive findings of the research and considers its limitations. As I said in Chapter One, there is a dearth of research on international volunteers for development and so this research was deliberately broad and exploratory in scope. Because of the exploratory nature of the research it was seen as important to draw together personal and professional insights, institutional experience as well as historical and recent literature to establish the big picture context. Despite the attempt to cast such a broad net, key insights were gleaned from the data and further research can build on this broad base to pursue narrower research aims. I have provided some suggestions for this at the end of the chapter. What is now required is consolidation of research in this area with the explicit partnership of donors, hosts organisations and countries, and IVCOs so that there is real ownership for
the findings and a shared research endeavour. While this may not have the autonomy I enjoyed, it should allow more resources and involvement in a systematic way that will build on this endeavour. It could even draw on the considerable data that I have only partially analysed because of time and scope constraints.

**Way forward with caution**

In the implementation and evaluation of the Paris Declaration principles the aid and development sector recognises the importance of ensuring results and equally the value of letting go to achieve mutual accountability and local ownership. To achieve their goals more quickly, official aid agencies are increasingly mainstreaming international volunteering and better resourcing even independent IVCOs to facilitate volunteering for development. They do this, to some extent, on the condition the IVCOs follow more closely donor aims and objectives. There are also increasingly examples of partnerships and community governance and support that have consolidated despite this tendency. Here, independent IVCO’s connection with trans-national civil society is crucial. Otherwise, official development agencies may diminish in the process, the traditional community governance and local accountability of volunteers that independent IVCOs have used as their distinctive modus operandi. Through this, the IVCOs cultivate citizen engagement with development and social justice as well as encourage stronger local ownership and accountability in the South, based on a relational approach to development.

It is important that the growing recognition of international volunteers does not create a situation where its most important and unique characteristics, that have grounded its successes, are diminished to duplicate existing technical assistance practice. This would be a great waste of a valuable resource that can help achieve the Paris Declaration

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79 After serious government critique MS evolved to strengthen its political work and member base and then become part of Actionaid as is discussed in Chapter Three.
principles of aid effectiveness and complement other efforts to do this. Going beyond that middle ground, individual IVCOs and their international volunteers can cultivate global citizenship through civil society to encourage concrete behaviour change for a more just and sustainable world. Now is definitely a great opportunity to consolidate the unique IVCO role as development NGOs with a specific volunteer focus. This highlights their specialisation on the interaction of people, skills and learning. The independent IVCOs have a strong foundation in their governance in civil society and history of work in social justice from Nicaragua to South Africa. This means they can be an independent voice for justice, development and sustainability that is tied to and centred by its relationship with civil society but also able to make responsive and productive connections with governments and institutions in North and South.

This view fits with what Michael Edwards (2008) said is a choice between a conventional development and ‘global civil society’ vision. He says the conventional development vision was based on resource transfer privileging technical responses over politics and quantity of resources over effective and appropriate use. He contrasts this with the global civil society vision which sees international law overcome selfish national interest. I equate my relational development view with his ‘global civil society’ scenario. Here citizens actively push their countries to negotiate resolution of global problems fairly and democratically, so burdens are justly shared, respecting autonomy and different contexts in recognition of the globally interconnected nature of causes and effects. Edwards (2008) reflected on the yet to be realised conclusion of the Manchester NGO conference in 1999 that: “NGOs… must move from ‘development as delivery to development as leverage’, and this would require the development of more equal relationships with other civil society actors, especially in the South, new capacities (like bridging and mediation), and stronger downward or horizontal accountability mechanisms” (p. 43).
This view of development NGOs using leverage; more equal relationships; new capacities; and stronger downward or horizontal accountability, is reflected in the experience of international volunteers and independent IVCOs in this research. This approach corresponds with the renewed contemporary interest in wellbeing with its material, relational and subjective dimensions (Sumner & Tiwari, 2009). It coincides with calls by the UK Sustainable Development Commission, The Worldwatch Institute and others in the North for prosperity without growth (L. R. Brown & Earth Policy Institute., 2008; Tim Jackson, 2009). It also appreciates and learns from the community level wellbeing already evident in parts of the South (The New Economics Foundation & Friends of the Earth, 2006) though this ‘appreciative enquiry’ must not be used as an excuse for inaction on injustice. In short, international volunteers for development and sustainability have a crucial contribution to make and require more attention hence the following recommendations or implications from the research. The first is focused on policy and practice. Given the exploratory nature of the research the rest suggest fruitful areas for future investigation.

**Recommendations**

1. IVCOs can act as a reminder, particularly to other civil society actors, of the importance of advocacy at all levels for diverse North-South relationships and justice beyond the simple economic or resource transfer mode in development. IVCOs at the same time have to remind themselves that at their core, they are involved in more than simply skills transfer. They are firmly grounded in a relational view of development which values cross cultural sensitivity, exchange and local accountability and should not be tempted to solely duplicate the more technically focused approaches without challenging and reshaping as well as complementing them. IVCOs should use the process emphasis of the Paris
Declaration principles as a benchmark to achieve stronger recognition in development circles for what they do best. This should be complemented with a wellbeing framework that recognises material, relational and subjective factors as well as grassroots civil society engagement. This fosters a genuine and uncompromising political approach to tackle causes not symptoms of development problems by siding with people who lack power.

2. In particular, further research work is needed on what is international volunteering’s contribution to development effectiveness against all five of the Paris Principles on aid effectiveness, not just ‘development impact’ or ‘managing for results’ in Paris Declaration language. There needs to be an analysis of how international volunteering can demonstrate the relevance of relational elements to development effectiveness in terms of ownership, alignment with country and local citizen priorities, harmonising with other aid and development players and achieving mutual accountability. This would be particularly timely given the recent OECD report on civil society contributions to aid effectiveness (OECD, 2009b). The Paris Declaration’s principle of ‘managing for results’ must also take into account the broader definition of development—not linked just to a narrow focus on TA and outcomes though investigation of the current global and regional scale of international volunteering compared to other forms of TA would be invaluable. Managing for results should also include relational goals benchmarked by long term achievements, cross cultural understanding and social justice in the North and South, using forms of measurement that can reflect this to the greatest possible extent. Wellbeing with its emphasis on material, relational and subjective dimensions at a collective, individual and North and South level, provides an obviously useful framework. Such research would be most comprehensive
through a longitudinal study that included the experience of IVCOs, volunteers and communities they engage with in the North and South, not just during volunteer assignments but before and after.

3. Another fruitful area for further research would be to compare specific international volunteer development experiences qualitatively and quantitatively by length of service; by country; by government and independent IVCO; for international volunteers working with Governments, NGOs or projects; and by sector for example health or education and environment. While this research endeavoured to look at volunteers for development and sustainability via an environment label in order to target individual volunteers, in practice non volunteer stakeholders frequently provided additional insights into international volunteers more generally. This is as would be expected, given a minority of all international volunteers work in environment related sectors, and so specific investigation of more narrowly bounded environmental work areas would be of great value. This is not however forgetting the invaluable lessons from this research on the importance of integrating environmental considerations with development through sustainability.

4. Finally organisational analysis of the IVCOs compared to other development organisations that do not use international volunteers (and national volunteer agencies that do not work in development) would also be potentially fruitful research as this is a very under considered area. The IVCOs could benefit from such specific research in the way that the development NGO sector has benefited in the last ten years from critical insights of researchers like David Lewis, Paul Opoku-Mensah, Alan Fowler, Michael Edwards (Edwards, 2008; Fowler, 2005; D. Lewis & Opoku-Mensah, 2006) and many others.
Personal reflection

Finally I want to reflect on my journey of volunteering and what I discovered in researching volunteers for this thesis. International volunteers return home truly to know that place for the first time with new eyes and I was no different on my return from volunteering in Nicaragua and Fiji. The exploration of this thesis has equally brought me back to see international volunteering differently. As Eliot (1959) says:

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (p. 59)

The thesis has drawn on a lifetime of reflection, interest and involvement in international development, sustainability and justice. It has used this to frame a subset of research questions that draw on the insights of other international volunteers and development stakeholders. This research has helped to reframe my view and see things differently – it reinforced:

1. My view that volunteers can challenge the status quo to guide a different more relational view of development.

2. A development view that explicitly demonstrates that the cross cultural side of volunteering is not simply an instrumental tool to achieve practical results but a valid end in itself for constructive global interaction.

However the research also demonstrated to me:

1. The valid complementary role that international volunteering can play with other forms of development cooperation or technical assistance.

2. It is a suitable intermediary to help transform people, institutions and structures through radical action AND through slow and patient compromises and incremental change. This combination is probably at once alarming and reassuring to mainstream organisations like the OECD and official development
agencies. If we are to be true to Paris Declaration principles like mutual accountability, it is a path that must be trod.

3. Trans-national civil society provides a basis for the transformation of development. It reflects citizens concerns and international volunteering provides a public face to development both overseas and at home. Such a public face for development is essential in order to bring home global realities and break down barriers of understanding and institutional inertia to create change towards more just international relations.

This for me is indeed the development of voluntary solidarity.
Appendices
Appendix 1: Initial survey – research questions for survey of volunteers

1. The role of international volunteer scientists in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) What kind of work are you doing as a volunteer scientist in a developing country?
   b) How important is the technical side of your work compared to the social and political factors of your work context? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?
   c) Do you think there is anything unique or special about your work of over other forms of international aid in science and technology? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?
   d) What kind of qualifications and experience do you have as background for your current work?

2. The experiences of volunteer scientists and their partner communities in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) In what ways has your perspective on sustainable development, and how to achieve it, changed as a result of your volunteer experiences alongside local communities?
   b) Do you think you have influenced the local understanding of the issues at stake in your work? If so how?
   c) How has your involvement/interaction with local communities influenced the way they operate? In what ways do you think this is different from their experiences with other foreign workers?
   d) On what information do you base decisions and action in your volunteer work? How do you reconcile differences in understanding of local problems and appropriate solutions between yourself as an international volunteer and the organisation you work with?
   e) Who has the most influence over the type of work you do as an international volunteer? Is this important for you and how you work?

3. Volunteer scientists’ achievements.
   a) What do you think is achievable as an international volunteer that would be harder or impossible to achieve as an official technical assistance expert staff or with other forms of aid for sustainable development?
b) What kinds of achievements are difficult for an international volunteer that other forms of aid would be more successful with?

c) What characteristics make international volunteers different to other forms of aid or technical assistance? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this?

4. International aid agencies and the work of volunteers.

a) Do you have any direct involvement with official aid agencies or their projects/programs in the area of environment/conservation or sustainability? If yes describe it.

b) How do you think the work of international volunteers is respected/acknowledged/supported by such agencies?

c) Do you think official aid agencies make a strong distinction between the work of international volunteers and other technical assistance personnel? If so in what ways are these distinctions seen as negative and in what ways are these seen as positive?

5. Follow up

a) Are you willing to be contacted in the future about your work and how its going?

b) Do you think your local employer would be prepared to fill out a survey form along similar lines? If so who do you think would be the most appropriate person to contact and at what address/email?

Many thanks for your time and your help. All the best with your work!
Appendix 2: Adapted email survey – research questions for survey of volunteers/development workers

1. The role of international volunteers/development workers in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) What kind of work are you doing as a volunteer/development worker in a developing country?
   b) How important is the technical side of your work compared to the social and political factors of your work context? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?
   c) Do you think there is anything unique or special about your work as a Skillshare Development Worker over other forms of international aid in environment, science and technology? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?
   d) What kind of qualifications and experience do you have as background for your current work?

2. The experiences of volunteers/development workers and their counterpart staff or partner communities in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) In what ways has your perspective on sustainable development, and how to achieve it, changed as a result of your volunteer/development worker experiences alongside local people/communities?
   b) Do you think you have influenced the local understanding of the issues at stake in your work? If so how?
   c) How has your involvement/interaction with local people/communities influenced the way they operate? In what ways do you think this is different from their experiences with other foreign workers (eg consultants, contract expert staff) or national government staff?
   d) On what information do you base decisions and action in your volunteer/development worker work? How do you reconcile differences in understanding of local problems and appropriate solutions between yourself as an international volunteer/development worker and the organisation you work with?
   e) Who has the most influence over the type of work you do as an international volunteer/development worker? Is this important for you and how you work?
   a) What do you think is achievable as an international volunteer/development worker that would be harder or impossible to achieve as an official technical assistance expert staff or with other forms of aid for sustainable development?
   b) What kinds of achievements are difficult for an international volunteer/development worker that other forms of aid would be more successful with?
   c) What characteristics make international volunteers/development workers different to other forms of aid or technical assistance? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this?

4. International aid agencies and the work of volunteers/development workers.
   a) Do you have any direct involvement with official aid agencies or their projects/programs in the area of environment/conservation or sustainability? If yes describe it.
   b) How do you think the work of international volunteers/development workers are respected/acknowledged/supported by such agencies?
   c) Do you think official aid agencies make a strong distinction between the work of international volunteers and other technical assistance personnel? If so in what ways are these distinctions seen as negative and in what ways are these seen as positive?

5. Follow up
   a) Are you willing to be contacted in the future about your work and how its going? When does your current assignment period finish?
   b) Do you think your local employer would be prepared to fill out a survey form along similar lines? If so who do you think would be the most appropriate person to contact and at what address/email?

Many thanks for your time and your help. All the best with your work!
The World Volunteer Web Speakers' Corner

Report on Discussion Round #1:
Volunteers & Environmental Sustainability
(8 October – 15 December 2004)

Draft 1.0: 1 February 2005

Prepared by Kanti Kumar

With inputs from Peter Devereux, Karin Svadlenak-Gomez & Catherine Gao (RONA)

Executive Summary

The Speakers’ Corner opened to the public in the first week of October 2004. In the inaugural discussion round, members discussed the topic of “What’s so special about volunteers?: Volunteers and environmental sustainability”, over a period of 10 weeks, until mid-December 2004. This discussion was moderated by Peter Devereux, former UNV PO in Fiji and currently a PhD researcher at the Institute for Sustainability and Technology Policy, Murdoch University in Australia.

RESOURCES: There was no technology cost for UNV for this project as OneWorld.net provided us free of cost the Dgroups platform for hosting the forum. There was no moderation fee either as Peter volunteered his time as moderator. In total, UNV invested 174 hours of its staff’s time over 85 working days in running the Speakers’ Corner. This averages to just over two hours’ work every day shared by 4-5 staff members.

PROFILE OF FORUM MEMBERS: During the first round of the discussions on the Speakers’ Corner, 672 members from more than 100 countries – from six continents – joined the forum,
representing a wide geographic coverage. The forum members included 20 colleagues from the UNV and 30 more from other UN agencies.

The majority of the forum members (nearly 64%) are in the age group of 25-44 years. Interestingly, the forum has more women members (56.4%) than men. The bulk of the forum members come from NGOs (42.6%). As a result, there was substantial sharing of grassroots experiences and examples in the discussions. There was good representation of inter-governmental agencies like UN as well (19.1%).

**PARTICIPATION LEVEL:** In total, 360 messages were posted to the forum after being screened by the moderator during the discussions. This averages to more than five messages a day, counting weekends and holidays, and is comparable with the normal message flow in active, result-oriented moderated discussion forums.

**DISCUSSION QUALITY:** The quality of the discussion has varied but overall the topic has generated good quality discussion and sharing of both practical examples as well as philosophical issues. About 20% of the responses have made deeply thoughtful contributions, followed by 60% making a useful contribution but with little detailed experience or example to illustrate further. There has been some diversity of views at times including some criticisms of volunteers, demonstrating a capacity to generate an open debate and honest sharing of views.

**VALUE OF THE FORUM:** The forum can be a strong promotional tool for UNV; the participation of 672 people from over 100 countries illustrates its potential. The forum provides a great opportunity for members to think and talk about key issues concerning volunteering for development, thereby promoting volunteerism itself, which is directly relevant to UNV’s mission. Through the forum, not only have we shared knowledge on important development issues and volunteers’ contributions towards them, we also raised awareness of UNV’s work.
Most of the members (58.5%) found the discussion forum useful or very useful in their work. About 32% said they found it partly useful. We also asked the members in what way the forum has helped most in their work. Most of them (52.1%) said they learned from others. Sharing experiences (24.5%) and networking (12.8%) were the other top benefits for the members.

**LESSONS LEARNED:** Partnering with key organizations has provided the forum legitimacy and reduced its cost for UNV. The response to the forum proves that there is a demand for an online global community space to discuss volunteering issues. There is also a need for such forums in different languages to discuss local and regional issues.

**FUTURE POTENTIAL:** The Speakers’ Corner can potentially be a very strong tool to promote UNV’s work to our constituency, including the UN and donor agencies. Together with the UNV and WVW sites and the Global Volunteer Update newsletters, the forum (or a multiple number of forums under this banner) can be used on a regular basis to promote UNV’s work, MDGs and volunteerism in general. The “word-of-the-mouth” effect of such a community can be far reaching for our advocacy and promotion efforts.
Moderators Report Prepared by Peter Devereux

Summary of discussions on volunteers and environmental sustainability

Role of volunteers and awareness of their contribution, among policymakers and environmental activists.
Silvia Golombek said in her work with youth volunteers they encourage the involvement of public officials in their projects in order to educate policy makers. Sonya Fernandez asked us to think about "the role of common citizens in transforming South Asia". Alicia Contreras said being more inclusive (of people with disabilities and others) will contribute to environmentally sustainable development. Vikas and others talked about E-teams and ICT (Information, Communication Technology) volunteers broadly but we still have limited examples of these volunteers contributing in a special or unique way to environmental sustainability.

Volunteering for environmental sustainability from the perspective of rich and poor.
Amber Rowe and Laiden Pedriña and others have really made us think about the different perspectives from rich and poor. Apete Naitini in Fiji also raised the issue of the difference between international volunteers and locals in terms of the significant resources used to mobilize and maintain international volunteers even if it is less than other international "experts". Amera Salman Yunus said "when you have no food, no clothing, no shelter, no job, no means to move forward the meaning of the word "volunteer” changes". It does change definitely but as Daniel Gochel from Ethiopia says "understanding and contributing for environmental sustainability may not demand every member of society to be scholars". Laiden and Debra suggested far from being just a "gap year" experience that many volunteers see their activities as a permanent "way of life". Mustapha Kemokai's experience with refugees in Sierra Leone shows the practical difficulties for achieving sustainability when people are evidently without other options.

Laiden from the Philippines and Mawuli Drake of Ghana reminded us from the "North" of our unsustainable consumption and other practices and that of some of our large companies and how that could be contrasted with some exemplary traditional sustainable practices of many rural and indigenous communities. Bolaji Popoola of Nigeria mentioned how he moved as a student to live amongst poor communities to help successfully combat waste dumping over a three year period. Mohammad Abu Baker in Palestine talked about their limited land for rubbish disposal and a new initiative to encourage composting.

Peter Devereux recalled from his international volunteer work how poor farmers in Nicaragua responded positively to compost when they realized they could make their own crop fertilizer free by composting organic wastes, thus allowing them to get more food with less spending on inputs. Some in fact helped rediscover traditional sustainable forms of farming and volunteered their time to exchange experiences with other poor farmers for mutual benefit.
We considered the idea of whether volunteering can legitimately be a win-win game which moves us away from, what sometimes became in the past, paternalistic volunteering when it was supposedly done just for the benefit of the receivers. Vinay from Mumbai mentioned the diversity of different motivations for volunteering in response to Shirley Xue's message from China about volunteer motivations. Karin responded she felt it didn't matter why people volunteer but that they did -- but the diversity of postings about volunteer motivations seem to suggest it is partly the range of motivations and values behind volunteering (and its passion and enthusiasm) that make it special. Some developing community participants like Furqan in Pakistan have talked about keenness to volunteer full time but limited opportunities to actually do so and the frustration that brings. We also haven't heard explicitly of community members who volunteer part time on top of their regular activities, even though this is the predominant volunteer way.

Helen Kuloba in Kenya spoke of youth volunteerism on environmental issues using drama and song but we still have heard relatively little of other creative ways of doing and promoting volunteering for environmental sustainability.

**Communities roles and attitudes to Local and/or international volunteers working for environmental sustainability.**

Rachel gave insightful comments about the pace of change and taking time with people exemplified by travelling by camel. Pam White discussed the pace of work for sustainability in working with local communities and the contrast between flexible directions/outcomes and the longer time spent with communities as a volunteer compared to working as a busy consultant.

The focus on local community perspectives on volunteering and environmental sustainability brought excellent insights. Filippinas Ga raised the problem from the Philippines about volunteer projects that weren't continued once the volunteer left because technical skills and knowledge were not effectively transferred to the local community. Others suggested volunteers living longer term were more likely to transfer skills than short term busy experts. Girija Godbole in India spoke of the passion and commitment of a Dutch volunteer who built his work on the base of friendly relations with local people. Helen Kuloba in Kenya spoke of the local community who cultivated in the forest and used it to gather firewood. In Fiji Ashwini Prabha talked about local community sustainability strategies for example using traditional taboos about taking certain fish to maintain stocks. Ana Salmanz spoke of her volunteer experience in El Salvador including the introduction of hydroponics. Pam White in Finland spoke of her volunteer work in Nicaragua and the importance of acknowledging and learning from her mistakes. Mary Merill mentioned the importance of mapping assets and strengths of communities rather than just deficits. This might be seen as a good way to ensure technical inputs are adapted if not generated locally? Nikolay Slabzhanin inspired us with her description of volunteer action to stop inappropriate nuclear waste dumping in Kazakhstan.
Volunteers/experts - and the transfer of technical skills and knowledge for environmental sustainability.

Mordi and others said that government policy has not adequately addressed the technical or technological requirements for effective waste management (disposal trucks, landfill site segregation, recycling). The vital role of NGOs and volunteers was highlighted as filling this void. People shared about governance, environmental education, control, experts and volunteers, time, dedication and plastic bags (an obviously deeply felt global problem). Pam White talked about the importance of providing a framework where locals could do it themselves as well as the importance of providing “appropriate tools” and combining these with an emphasis on relationships which are sometimes underplayed when technology or "western Science" gets in the picture. Karin Svadlenak-Gomez spoke of the importance of governments building on informal responses like that of the "waste pickers and small junk shop operators" to create synergies for environmental sustainability. Alex Zingwa, Amber Rowe, Nandom Gunen and others spoke of the importance of community empowerment. Arman Vermishyan suggested a policy of "zero waste" could set a clear goal though we still could use more practical examples.

Debmani Sengupta suggested legislation and law enforcement were indispensable. Mary Merrill emphasised the importance of orientation and training and Marybelle Stryk an understanding of deeply ingrained customs and cultures. Rosanna Tarsiero directed us to the experience of the national environmental educators network. Katherine discussed the importance of volunteers as guests rather than controllers of processes. Andre Nguemdjom spoke of how crucial good governance is and how complementing volunteer initiatives with other support can provide special synergies (outcomes better than just the obvious inputs). Faith Ndegwa also mentioned how good coordination of volunteer targets, goals and practical initiatives help restore peace, trust and responsibility of governments.

We recalled the huge impetus the international year of volunteers gave as an overarching framework and stimulus for work on volunteering for environmental sustainability and every other reason! It was suggested the UN decade for education for sustainable development starting in 2005 could provide another positive framework.

Governments and institutions facilitating volunteer involvement in environmental sustainability programs through appropriate laws and policies.

Debra Kohler expressed concern about volunteers having to fill the gaps governments leave and Mustapha Kemokai mentioned how sometimes elected officials were nervous about volunteers "doing their work for them"! Debra also said: "Passion and commitment are the basis of good volunteering practices. Support, advice, and friendship are not well offered when wrapped in red tape. Passion unwraps the red tape and commitment offers the necessary support for the longevity of sustainable environmental projects. Sally Paulin asked from her experience in Australia whether: "by instituting government policy and top down structures which provide funding and organisational assistance for environmental projects, are we creating voluntary community groups which begin to depend on the funding and
support from 'elsewhere' and down the track feel unable to do anything without support which is 'granted' rather than fundraised, earned or using their own community assets”. Amber and Pat Ford stressed the importance of government support for education on environmental sustainability to engender volunteer action on it and Andre Nguemdjom mentioned rural radio as one disseminator of such information in Cameroon. Debbie Rosador mentioned how networking among regional volunteers enabled successful advocacy for government policy in the Dominican Republic. Juan in Spain talked of the evolution of laws there around volunteering and the debate that engendered amongst volunteer groups about this formal recognition and its implications (and relation to paid work). Rosela Gementiza gave us the example of a landcare project piloted in Cagayan de Oro Mindanao that used community mobilization and teacher training to encourage environmental sustainability. Hellen Kulloba from Kenya said she was cautious about what seems to be an 'overcommercialised' promotion of volunteering in some Northern Countries which could be better spent on providing for basic needs around the world. Moses Oduogoh contrasts the "monetary approach to everything in the current world" with "how noble service is" and that through volunteering "we can move the world". Debra Kohler also spoke of civil service programs in Germany and other countries allowing people to make environmental and other contributions. Faith Ndegwa gave a good summary of how volunteering can be facilitated and encouraged by government whilst volunteers themselves must be advocates to keep governments on track with environmental protection and responding to human needs.

Some of the key individual threads (now clustered) from the discussion are as follows (with some examples of people who commented on them):

* Volunteer motivations (Frederick 16 Oct, Shirley China 21 Oct, Susan Canada 21 Oct, Oduogoh Kenya 21 Oct, Rosanna 22 October, Juan Diego Spain Oct 25)
Volunteers as special (Dorte 12 Oct, Kathryn 13 Oct, Mawuli 17 Oct)
Volunteering as a phase (Girija India 18 October)
* Volunteer commitment and passion (Mawuli, 17 Oct, Karin 21 October, Juan Diego 28 Oct)
* Volunteers as catalysts/multipliers ++ (Hellen Kenya 14 Oct)
* Being vs doing (Vinay Mumbai 16,20 Oct)
* Volunteer interactions/friendships with people (Amber, Philippines Oct 17, Debra UK 21 Oct, Girija 27 Oct, Mary nov 8, Paul USA nov 11)
* Volunteering as a way of life (Laiden 18 October, Debra UK 21 Oct)
Volunteering alongside locals under similar conditions (Bolaji Nigeria 19 October, Pamela 4 Nov)
* Pace of change (Rachel Kenya 28 Oct, Ana El Salvador/Australia 30 Oct, Pamela Finland Nov 4)
* Volunteers as guests rather than controllers of processes (Katherine 11 Nov)
* Learning from mistakes (Pamela 31 Oct)
Links between peace/conflict resolution and environmental sustainability (Anthony Nigeria 18 Oct, Andre, Cameroon 2 Nov)

Inclusive participation in sustainability for people with disabilities (Alicia 13 Oct, Alicia USA 15 Oct)

Volunteering, sustainability and policymaker awareness (Silvia 13 Oct, 14 October)
* Legislation and law enforcement (Debjani India 6 Nov)
* Good governance facilitating volunteering (Faith Kenya 10 Nov)

Volunteering and environmental education (Katy, 12 October, Nikolay Kazakhstan 14 October, Thiru India 14 Oct, Rosanna Nov 9)
* National youth service (Donald, 14 October)

Volunteers, environmental sustainability and poverty/inequality (Amera, 13 October, Oyebisi 13 October, Mustapha Sierra Leone 15 Oct, Laiden Philippines 16 Oct, Mawuli Ghana 17 Oct, Amber 18 Oct)
* Integrating voluntary initiatives for responding to human needs (Andre Cameroon 25 Oct)
* International and local volunteers (Apete Fiji Oct 20, Rachel Kenya 13 October)
* Resourced/unresourced volunteers (Christina Philippines Oct 13, Amber 17 Oct, Andre Cameroon Nov 2)

Volunteering and waste management (Mohammed Palestine 14 October, Sonya India Oct 15, John Philippines 21 Oct, Silvia Bolivia 26 Oct)
* Volunteering and ownership/payment for environmental sustainability (Amber, Girija 18 Oct)

Defining sustainable development (Karin, 14 October, Nagendra 15 Oct)

Volunteerism and culture (Amera Pakistan 14 October, Andre Cameroon Nov 2)
* Volunteering, culture skills and exchange (Leila, USA 21 Oct, Sally Australia 22 Oct)
* Traditional volunteers and volunteer practices Amber Philippines October 17, Deborah Bonn 18 October, Ashwini Fiji Oct 28)

Volunteering for sustainability-do we need to be scholars/experts? (Daniel Ethiopia Oct 15, Channdika Canada 15 Oct)
* Volunteers and technical skill transfer (Filipinas Philippines 31 Oct)
* Volunteers and experts, local vs imported solutions (Pamela Finland 4 Nov, Mary Nov 8)
* Locals with expert skills (Andre Cameroon Nov 10)
* Technical skills and relationships with local people (Debra 5 Nov)
Capacity building (Andre Cameroon Nov 2)

Volunteer participation/advocacy for the environment (laiden Oct 18, Josephine Sierra Leone Oct 25, Nikolay 26 Oct)

* Mapping community assets not deficits (Mary 25 Oct)
* Community involvement/empowerment (Amber Oct 26 Josephine Oct 25, Mustapha 1 Nov, Zingwa Zimbabwe 10 Nov)

Volunteer support creating dependence? (Sally, 11 Nov, Amber 16 Nov)

* Formal and informal sector links for environmental sustainability (Karin 4 Nov)

Measurable indicators (Rosanna 23 Oct)

Plastic bags and community, volunteer and other responses (many many!)
### Table 3: Volunteer survey themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Node themes/rank most commonly mentioned by volunteer survey respondents</th>
<th>% (actual no./30)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/local accountability</td>
<td>&gt;65% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/VSA ethos-preparation-support</td>
<td>&gt;60% (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/cross cultural issues</td>
<td>65% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/personal aspects</td>
<td>60% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/learning</td>
<td>50% (15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ local conditions-incl work-social mix</td>
<td>&gt;45% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ trust-understanding</td>
<td>&gt;45% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers, coms and staff/Change via volunteer experience/local understanding</td>
<td>&gt;45% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer achievements/hard for volunteers easier for others</td>
<td>&gt;45% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Experiences of volunteers, coms and staff/Change via volunteer experience/appreciation of complexity-difficulty</td>
<td>&gt;40% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ pace of change</td>
<td>&gt;40% (13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ power-resources</td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ motivation</td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/Technical social political mix/capacity development</td>
<td>40% (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ respect for vol status</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ relationships</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer achievements/characteristics of volunteers/flexible TOR</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer achievements/Possible as volunteer only/local understanding</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/Technical social political mix/local understanding</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers as distinctive by official/complementarity</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers and staff/ who most influences vol work-is this important</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers and staff/ influenced local understanding by vol work</td>
<td>&gt;35% (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/ collaborative work</td>
<td>&gt;30% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers, coms and staff/Change via volunteer exp/capacity building importance</td>
<td>&gt;30% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers and staff/Basis for volunteer decisions/local direction</td>
<td>&gt;30% (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Volunteer achievements/Possible as volunteer only/work level</td>
<td>30% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/extended period</td>
<td>30% (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Volunteer respect by aid agencies/not respected</td>
<td>&gt;25% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/Technical, sociopolitical mix/political</td>
<td>&gt;25% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of volunteers/Change via volunteer exp/importance of flexibility-time</td>
<td>&gt;25% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Experiences of volunteers, coms and staff/Change via volunteer exp/community importance</td>
<td>&gt;20% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/Technical, sociopolitical mix/contextual planning</td>
<td>&gt;20% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of volunteers/unique special aspects/local ownership</td>
<td>&gt;20% (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer achievements/Possible as volunteer only/getting things done</td>
<td>&gt;20% (7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix 5: Ranked order by number of all non volunteer stakeholders (or just host) citing issue

Table 4: Theme ranked order by all non volunteer stakeholders and just host

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Node/themes most commonly mentioned</th>
<th>All % (actual no./42)</th>
<th>Host % (actual/14)- Rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Volunteer characteristics - accompaniment</td>
<td>86% (36)</td>
<td>100% (14)-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Volunteer recognition -Cultural exchange vs devt and impact</td>
<td>74% (31)</td>
<td>71% (10)-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Volunteer characteristics -local accountability and ownership</td>
<td>71% (30)</td>
<td>64% (9)-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Volunteer characteristics -personal aspects</td>
<td>71% (30)</td>
<td>79% (11)-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics -learning</td>
<td>69% (29)</td>
<td>57% (8)-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-motivation, values, &amp; ideas</td>
<td>67% (28)</td>
<td>71% (10)-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics -local conditions and extended period</td>
<td>62% (26)</td>
<td>64% (9)-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Shifts in thinking and practice-local direction and joint decision making</td>
<td>62% (26)</td>
<td>64% (9)-10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics –liaison &amp; bridging</td>
<td>62% (26)</td>
<td>71% (10)-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Volunteer recognition - complementarity with other development initiatives</td>
<td>57% (24)</td>
<td>57% (8)-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics -IVCO ethos &amp; support</td>
<td>50% (21)</td>
<td>50% (7)-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-both technical and other support</td>
<td>50% (21)</td>
<td>79% (11)-3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Volunteer recognition -capacity development contribution</td>
<td>50% (21)</td>
<td>50% (7)-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Shifts in thinking and practice-wk level and independence</td>
<td>48% (20)</td>
<td>79% (11)-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-relationships</td>
<td>48% (20)</td>
<td>36% (5)-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-mutual benefit and change</td>
<td>45% (19)</td>
<td>50% (7)-16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Volunteer recognition- seeing reality/ respond to local needs</td>
<td>45% (19)</td>
<td>50% (7)-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-capacity development</td>
<td>43% (18)</td>
<td>57% (8)-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics-cross cultural issues</td>
<td>40% (17)</td>
<td>50% (7)-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics - tech soc pol mix-local knowledge incl mutual strengths, incl contextual planning</td>
<td>40% (17)</td>
<td>50% (7)-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Volunteer role characteristics – limited power &amp; resources</td>
<td>40% (17)</td>
<td>36% (5)-25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1. Host, volunteer and non-volunteer percentages of participants citing particular themes in survey or at interview from NVIVO analysis.
Appendix 7: New aid paradigm from Stern et al. (2008)

Stern et al. say by 2005 there was consensus among international organisation on “how aid and development should be understood and managed” (E. D. Stern, et al., 2008, p. vi) namely:

1. Donors and countries of the South should have cooperative partnerships grounded in clearly defined roles as well as separate and joint responsibilities
2. Development results should be based on the MDGs—“poverty reduction, the provision of basic needs in education and health, together with gender equality and environmental sustainability” (p. vi)
3. Economic policy and budgeting should support development results (2 above) not be seen in themselves as development goals
4. Countries of the South lead in the definition of their own development priorities and formulating and strengthening policies and institutions to achieve them
5. The state should ensure citizens human rights, basic services and good governance and compensate for market failure
6. “Citizens and civil society more generally should be involved in the development process” (p. vi)
7. Aid contributes to development as a facilitator, not the primary driver
8. Policy coherence is important to “ensure that all resources, policies and decisions reinforce each other” (p. vi)
9. Donors should support Southern country priorities and “respect their partners national planning, administrative, analytic and management capacities” (p. vi)
10. A prerequisite for country leadership is strengthening capacity
11. Donors should minimise administration and accountability burdens for aid recipients (p. vi)
Appendix 8: Research questions for survey/interview of hosts/counterparts

1. The role of international volunteers/development workers in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) In your organization what kind of work do international volunteers do towards sustainable development?
   b) How important is the technical side of their work compared to the social and political factors of your work context? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?
   c) Do you think there is anything unique or special about the work of international volunteers/development workers over other forms of international aid in environment, science and technology? Can you give any practical examples that illustrate your point?

2. The experiences of volunteers/development workers and their partner communities in the area of sustainable development in developing countries.
   a) In what ways has your perspective on sustainable development and how to achieve it, changed as a result of your experiences having an international volunteer work with you/your organization/community?
   b) How do you think their involvement/interaction with you, your organization and local communities influences the way they operate? In what ways is this different from your experiences with other foreign workers?
   c) How do you think you have influenced the international volunteer/development worker’s understanding of the local issues and perspectives at stake in your work?
   d) On what information do you base decisions and action in your work together? How do you reconcile differences in understanding of local problems and appropriate solutions between the international volunteer/development worker and you/the organisation?
e) Who has the most influence over the type of work the international volunteer/development worker does? How is this important for you?

   a) What do you think is achievable with the help of an international volunteer/development worker that would be harder or impossible to achieve with official technical assistance expert staff or other forms of aid for sustainable development?

   b) What kinds of achievements are difficult to achieve with the help of an international volunteer/development worker that other forms of aid would be more successful with?

   c) What characteristics make international volunteer/development workers different to other forms of aid or technical assistance? What are the advantages/disadvantages of this?

4. How international aid agencies see the work of volunteers/development workers.
   a) Do you have any direct involvement with official aid agencies or their projects/programs in the area of environment/conservation or sustainability? If yes describe it.

   b) How do you think the work of international volunteer/development workers is respected/acknowledged/supported by such agencies?

   c) Do you think official aid agencies make a strong distinction between the work of international volunteer/development workers and other technical assistance personnel? If so in what ways are these distinctions seen as negative and in what ways are these seen as positive?

Many thanks for your time and your help. All the best with your work!
References


Earth Policy Institute.


OECD (2007). OECD: What is it? Retrieved January 28, 2007, from [http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_201185_2068050_1_1_1_1,00.html#what](http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_201185_2068050_1_1_1_1,00.html#what)


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