Equilateral
Research and Consulting

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Learning from the standards self -assessment pilot – Full report

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Executive summary

Introduction

The Global Standard for Volunteering for Development was developed in 2018–19, through a global consultation process across the Volunteering for Development sector. As part of the validation of the standard a self-assessment tool and learning action planning framework have been piloted amongst 30 organisations representing a diverse range of volunteer involving organisations. The pilot took place during 2020 and this report presents the findings/ from a learning exercise commissioned by Forum and conducted with the pilot organisations from Sept 2020 to January 2021.

A survey was developed and used to gain feedback on the content of the standard, experiences of using the self-assessment and learning action tools, support needs for organisations using the tools and organisational learning emerging from the process. The survey was supplemented with four case studies which highlight the experiences and learning of organisations taking part in the pilot.

Summary of findings

Content of the standard

Whilst many organisations felt that the standard is a useful, flexible and comprehensive tool for strengthening operational delivery, it was considered to be most relevant for international organisations working with international volunteers. National and local organisations and those focusing on work with community and informal volunteers reported that some of the indicators were too onerous and did not align well with their work.

Some found the standard to be clear, but others felt that some of the language used is complicated, and the actions and indicators vague, making it difficult for organisations to use. This may reflect levels of previous exposure to tools using this type of structure and format which are relatively familiar in some countries and cultures, and more likely to be new and alien to others. There were also many comments about the need for materials to be translated in to French and also local languages.

Perceived gaps identified included a section to evaluate the quality of relationships with organisations and partners supporting volunteer activities, a section on the efficiency of the use of available resources and something to support evaluation of what volunteers bring. Some wanted more on working with local volunteers and some identified a need for indicators on climate change, inclusion and social and environmental innovation.

Recommendations

- Set up a task focused working group with a small number of national and local organisations and those who work with informal volunteers to review the content and identify possible adaptations.

- Simplify the language used in the standard which would increase clarity and make it easier for organisations to engage confidently.

- Translate the standard and supporting documentation into French and other local languages to enhance accessibility.

- Consider the inclusion of areas identified as gaps in the standard. Whilst it may not be possible to include all the identified gaps it will be helpful to provide a rationale for including or not including identified areas.

- It is important to ensure that a mechanism is in place for reviewing the standard over time to ensure that it retains operational relevance.

The self-assessment process

The self-assessment process had helped organisations to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work, helped with the implementation and management of their volunteering programme, identification of improvements, reflective practice and evaluation of work.

Organisations identified drivers which had helped them to make progress with the self-assessment process and these include motivation to improve, support from organisational leadership, support from colleagues, effective team work and planning and the timing of the exercise fitting well from an operational perspective. The guidance and support from Forum and other members of the working group were also reported as valuable. Barriers to progress with the self-assessment process included the language used in the standard, time pressures, resource limitations, challenges in engaging with partner organisations or country offices and competing priorities especially pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some organisations had benefited from focusing their self-assessment process on certain aspects of the standard where they identified a need for improvements. This approach has made the self-assessment processes more targeted and realistic.

Most participating organisations said the self-assessment process had brought about some change ranging from improved vision, strategic direction and prioritisation and increased awareness of strengths and weaknesses. For some organisations the changes reported were about an increase in awareness in specific areas and for others it was a change in approach to their work or an increased focus in areas such as mental health or tightened safeguarding and security practices.

Recommendations

- When marketing the standard emphasise the drivers that have supported the progress of organisations taking part in the pilot. This will help organisations to prepare and position themselves to gain maximum benefit from going through the process.

- Ensure that the self-assessment tool and guidance are made available in French and other local languages to enhance accessibility.

- Consider introducing a "not applicable" option within the tool to help organisations focus on the relevant areas as they progress through the tool in acknowledgement that not all indicators will apply to all organisations.

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Organisational learning

All organisations said that they had experienced organisational learning as a result of going through the self-assessment process and some highlighted how they had benefited from the process of self-reflection. They valued the fact that the process helped them to see what they were doing well and at the same time identify areas for improvement. Areas for improvement identified included improved practices and operating procedures, volunteer management, safety and safeguarding, data management, measuring impact, training, inclusion of volunteers and mental health.

Most organisations said that they had made changes as a result of going through the self-assessment process and these changes included organisational strategies, processes and documentation, formalisation of informal volunteering, prioritisation of mental health, approaches to inclusivity and in one case setting up a committee to assess the impact of actions.

Recommendations

- Emphasise to organisations that their own needs must be at the heart of the self-assessment process and they can adapt use accordingly by focusing on the core areas of certain domains.

- Promote the value self-reflection and assessment as a mechanism to support continuous improvement.

- Emphasise accountability for delivering change can be generated as a culture from within the organisation rather than relying on external accountability mechanisms.

Support

Organisations valued the support that they had received as they undertook the self-assessment process. They valued the guidance notes and access to supporting documents and also the opportunity to have personal support and guidance from Forum. The opportunity to share ideas, challenges and progress with other organisations also going through the self-assessment process was very valuable. They felt that mentoring, case studies and a mock exercise would also be very useful for organisations going through the self-assessment process in the future.

In many respects the support needs of organisations going through the self-assessment process is the most complex consideration for the wider roll out of the standard as consideration needs to be given as to how these needs can be met. Support needs varied considerably across organisations with some finding the process clear and the structure of the standard familiar and straightforward whilst others struggled with both the content and elements of the structure. Supplying mentoring support to organisations is time consuming and will potentially have a significant resource implication.

Recommendations

- Assess the scale and profile of organisations that the standard is marketed towards in order to estimate the level of support that could be needed for organisations going through the self-assessment process.

- Consider developing a series of short YouTube videos to offer support for organisations in key areas.

- Consider the use of a buddying or peer support system where organisations identifying support needs as they go through the self-assessment process can access this support from an organisation that has already been through the process.

Introduction

The Global Standard for Volunteering for Development was developed in 2018–19, through a global consultation process involving several hundred stakeholders from across the Volunteering for Development sector. The standard, which was launched in October 2019, is voluntary, with the aim of improving the outcomes of volunteering for development and of ensuring organisations working with volunteers are both impactful and responsible in their practice. The standard is structured against four key areas and contains a series of actions and corresponding indicators for each of these areas:

- Designing and delivering projects
- Duty of care
- Manging volunteers
- Measuring impact

As part of the validation of the standard, a total of thirty volunteer involving organisations agreed to test the standard in practice through piloting a self-assessment and action planning process ahead of a wider roll out. A guide to self-assessment, self-assessment tool and learning action plan template were developed to help facilitate this process. The pilot took place during 2020 and this report presents the findings/ from a learning exercise commissioned by Forum and conducted with the pilot organisations from Sept 2020 to January 2021.

The objectives of the learning exercise were:

- To validate the content and structure of the standard and inform revisions for 2021.
- To validate a self-assessment process for launch to all relevant organisations in 2021.
- To ensure the standard and self-assessment process are helpful for the full diversity of volunteering for development organisations.
- To establish learning that has occurred through the self-assessment process.
- To gather case studies and experiences which will encourage awareness and adoption of the standard.

Approach to the exercise

All participating organisations were asked to take part in a detailed online anonymous survey which sought views and feedback on the content of the standard and experiences of undertaking the self-assessment process and, where applicable, the learning action plan. It also considered the support accessed by organisations undertaking the self-assessment process and considered how well the support they accessed met their needs.

Emerging findings from the survey were presented to the standards working group and used to inform the identification of four case studies which are presented at the end of this report. The case studies highlight the experiences and learning of organisations taking part in the pilot. A sampling strategy was used to ensure diversity across the organisations selected. Each case study organisation took part in an in-depth interview to provide detailed information and learning which was used to produce each case study which was then validated with the organisation. The themes for the case studies are:

- Selecting specific areas of focus – Singapore International Foundation
- Application for e-volunteering – Cuso International
- Involvement of the full team and embedding the learning – VSO Rwanda
- Application for community volunteering - National Forum for Advocacy Nepal.
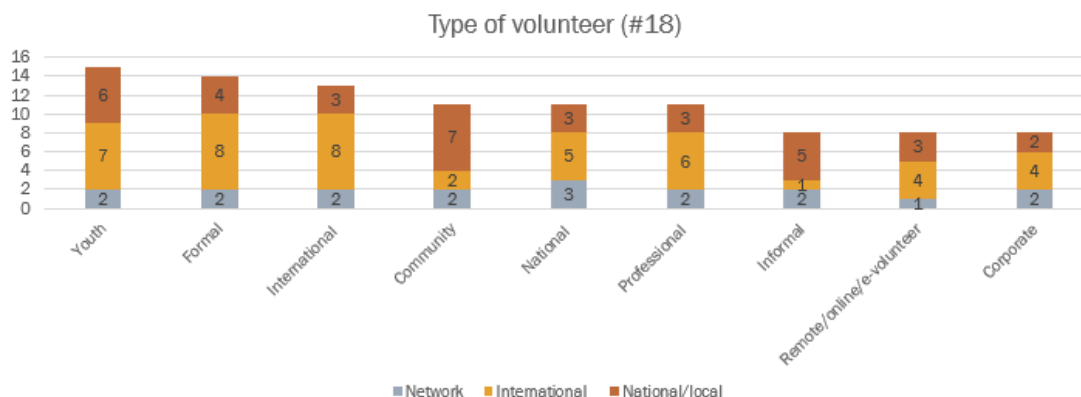
Profile of participating organisations

All organisations participating in the pilot of the standard self-assessment process were invited to provide feedback through an on-line survey. Responses were received from a total of 18 organisations. Of those responding 44% (8) were international organisations, 39% (7) were national or local organisations and 17% (3) were network organisations. A third of organisations (6) work with less than 100 volunteers in a typical year whilst the majority (11) work with between 100 and 999 volunteers and only one works with over 1000 volunteers. Figure 1 shows the distribution of participating organisations by organisation type against the number of volunteers they work with.

Figure 1 – Number of volunteers worked with in a typical year by organisation type
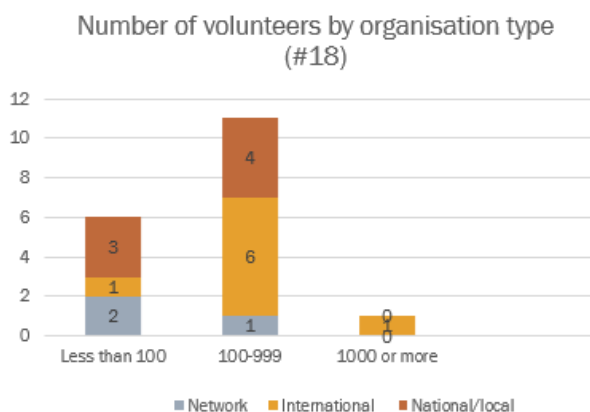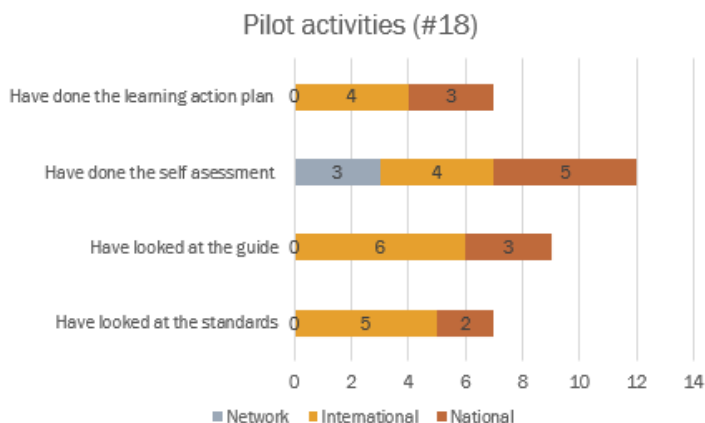

All participating organisations work with at least two different types of volunteer and some work with as many as nine different types of volunteer. Figure 2 below shows the number of participating organisations working with each volunteer type by type of organisation. Youth and formal volunteering were the most represented and informal, remote/online and corporate were least represented. It should be noted that whilst some of the categories of volunteer may have a relatively universal definition there may be other categories, such as 'informal', that can be defined in differing ways and may be context specific.

Figure 2 – Type of organisation by volunteer type

Two thirds of participating organisations (12) had completed the self-assessment process although a number said that they had only been able to focus on the core actions. Half (9) had used the self-assessment guidance and just under half (7) had completed a learning action plan. Figure 3 shows pilot activities by organisation type and it is of note that whilst all network organisations had completed the self-assessment process none had gone on to complete the learning action plan.

Figure 3 – Pilot activities by organisation type

Pilot activities (#18)

Have done the learning action plan 0 4 3

Have done the self asessment 3 4 5

Have looked at the guide 0 6 3

Have looked at the standards 0 5 2

0   2   4   6   8   10   12   14

■ Network   ■ International   ■ National

Views about the content of the standard

Figure 4 shows how organisations rated their satisfaction with the content of the standard on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. The majority (over 80%) rated their satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5.   They said that it offers flexibility and has been useful for strengthening operational delivery. It has helped organisations to track and manage work with volunteers and to improve community impact. Some felt that it was more relevant for international organisations working with international volunteers compared to national or local organisations which tend to be smaller and may be working with less resources, infrastructure and specialist staff. Others said that whilst it is comprehensive, some of the actions conflict within specific country contexts.

> *"The Forum standards pilot does not touch the local realities, seems to only focus on international volunteer agencies."* [National/local organisation]

Case study 4 reflects on the experiences of a national network organisation working with informal community volunteers and explores how staff adapted the standards to fit their context.

Figure 4 - Satisfaction with the content of the standard by type of organisation

Satisfaction with the standard (#18)

5   1   2   1

4   2   5   4

3   0   1   0

2   0   1

1   0   1

0   2   4   6   8   10   12

■ Network   ■ International   ■ National/local

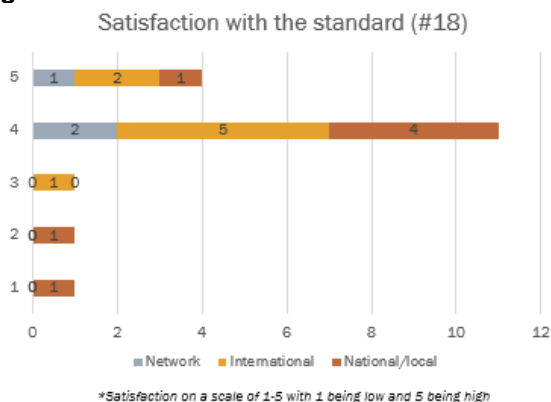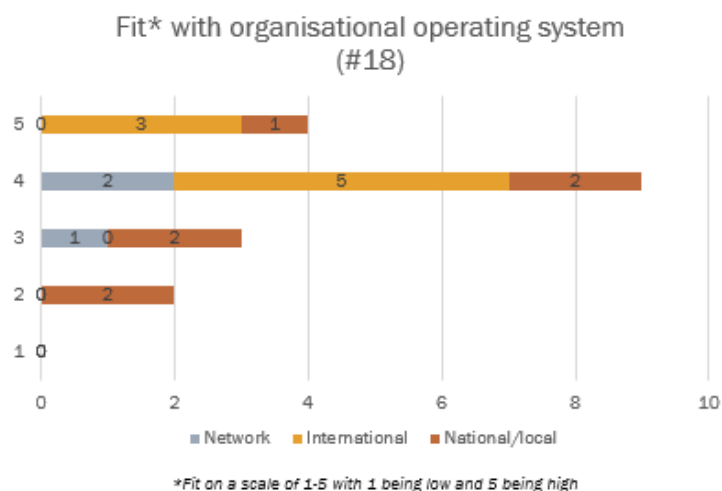*Satisfaction on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high*

Figure 5 shows how organisations rated the strength of fit of the standard with their organisational operating systems on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Just under three quarters of respondents (over 72%) rated their satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5. It is notable that national/regional organisations tended to give a lower rating for the strength of fit of the standard. Some said that they had not been able to fully implement the standard. For example, one international organisation described how they had been able to apply the standard at a global level but there has been a significant gap in adapting it to fit their national and

local context. Whilst it has brought new ideas about volunteer management some participants commented that they felt some of the indicators do not connect well with some local beliefs and common practices.
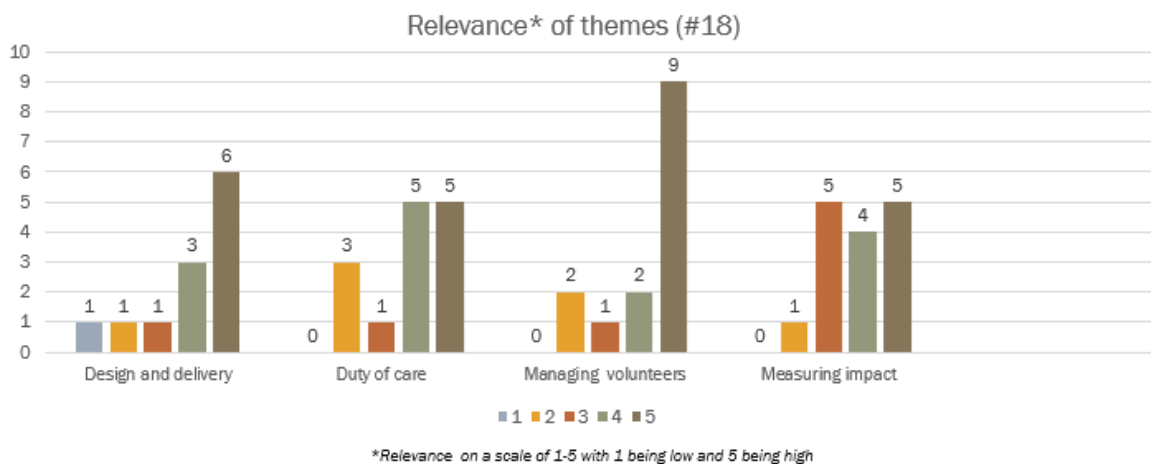
Figure 5 – Strength of fit with organisational operating system by type of organisation

Fit on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Organisations were asked to rate the relevance of the four themes of the standard on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Figure 6 shows that managing volunteers was considered most relevant with half the participants rating it at 5. Ratings across the other three areas were similar with duty of care receiving the highest proportion of low scores. Some acknowledged the interconnectivity between the four themes:

> *"In our opinion these four themes are all relevant and inseparable to improve the performance of volunteers' actions."* [National/local organisation]

Figure 6 – Relevance of the themes of the standard

Relevance on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Organisations were asked to rate the relevance of the actions and indicators of the standard on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Figure 7 shows that three quarters of responding organisations rated their relevance at 4 or 5 with only one national/local organisation rating their relevance at 1. Some highlighted that some indicators may be too onerous for small or resource-strapped organisations and it would be helpful to make some of the key actions and indicators optional. It was also felt that it would be useful to add a section to evaluate the quality of relationships with organisations and partners supporting the volunteer activities. The case studies highlight examples of how some pilot organisations found it to be helpful to be selective in their approach to self- assessment (Case study 1 and case study 4).

Figure 7 – Relevance of the actions and indicators of the standard by type of organisation

Relevance* of actions and indicators (#17)

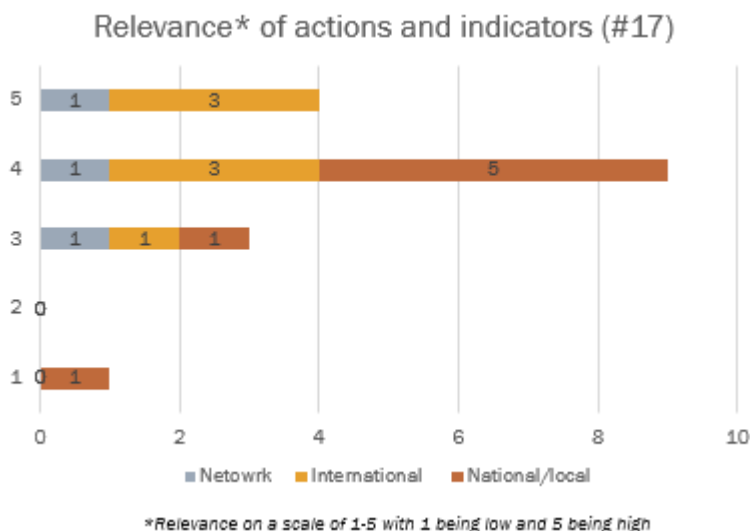*Relevance on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Figure 8 shows how organisations rated the clarity and ease of the standard on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Just under three quarters of respondents (over 70%) rated clarity and ease at 4 or 5 out of 5. Some felt that some of the standards are complicated and the actions and indicators vague making it difficult for organisation to use and simplifying the language would increase clarity and make it easier for organisations to engage confidently. The importance of translating the standard into both French and local languages was raised in order to increase clarity and ease of use for many organisations. (see case study 4). One participant commented that the ranking system was unfamiliar and difficult to understand.

Figure 8 – Clarity and ease of the standard by type of organisation

Clarity and ease* of standard (#17)

*Clarity and ease on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high
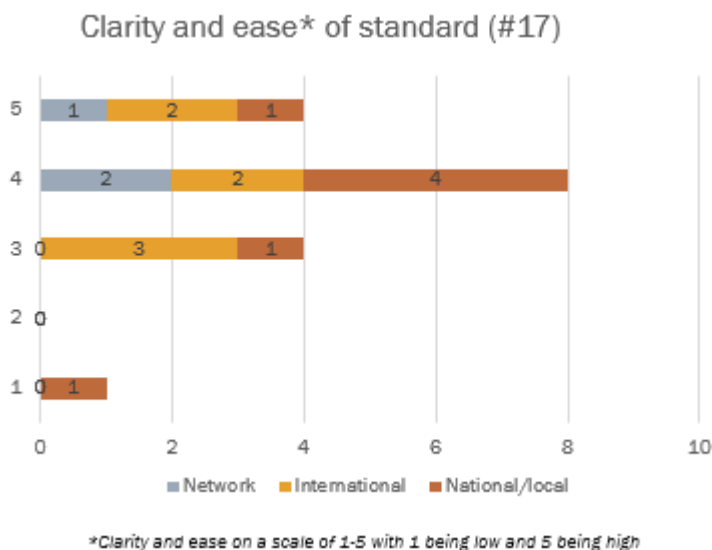
Organisations were asked to indicate if they felt there were any gaps within the standard. Some felt a need for a section on relationships with technical and financial partners, a section of the efficiency of the use of available resources and something to support evaluation of what volunteers bring. Some wanted more on working with local volunteers and some identified a need for indicators on climate change and social and environmental innovation, and some wanted more on inclusion.

> *"More inclusion, diversity and anti-racism indicators. Probably a separate standard is needed for organisations receiving or working with local volunteers."* [International organisation]

"Strengthening the capacity of volunteering by focusing on local volunteering agencies and volunteers" [[National/local organisation]

Some of the organisations were however happy with the current content of the standard:

"*The standard is perfect and seems to be adapted to all types of volunteering that our organisation is working on"* [National/local organisation]

Experiences of the self-assessment process

Those organisations that had made progress with the self-assessment process were asked what factors had contributed to their progress. Some described internal organisational factors such as a motivation to improve, support from leaders within the organisation, support from colleagues, effective team work, developing a work plan for the assessment and the timing of the pilot fitting well with the need for a review. Some said that the self-assessment guidance and structure had helped them to progress and others mentioned the valuable support that they had received from Forum and other members of the working group. One organisation reported that it had been helpful to choose to focus on two of the themes that were identified as having the greatest organisational relevance (see case study 1).

Organisations were asked to identify the main barriers and challenges for them in making progress with the self-assessment process. Unsurprisingly, time pressures and competing priorities especially pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic were mentioned by a number of organisations. One said that they did not have the time or resources to communicate with partners fully about the self-assessment process during the pilot. Even though some organisations recognised the interconnectivity between themes some chose to focus on certain themes or actions in order to make the self-assessment process realistic for them within the timeframe for the pilot. This is reflected in more detail in case studies 1 and 4.

"We did not put everything in our action plan because the type of volunteering we promote would necessitate several types of actions and the plan would be too heavy with activities." [National/local organisation]

Some mentioned facing delays because they were waiting for feedback or delays due to changes in key personnel and some also highlighted that they had joined the pilot late. Some organisations had found it difficult not having the resources in their language and one participant said that they did not find the self-assessment process very clear.

Two thirds of organisations said that they experienced challenges with the self-assessment process which they linked directly to the type of organisation. Some of the smaller organisations for example felt that some of the indicators did not align well for them and considered that the fit would be better for larger international agencies and those working more formally with volunteers. One organisation highlighted that they had struggled with the indicators that made reference to working at a governmental level because they were unsure to what extent the ministries report against the SDGs and this was not within their control. It was felt it could be useful to have a "not applicable "option against the indicators within the tool. Another organisation commented that they do not work directly with children so some of the child protection indictors did not seem relevant.

One international organisation had only been able to use the self-assessment process at a global level and limited time and resources had prevented it being used at a local level. Some organisations described challenges with engaging member organisations or partners because of geographical coverage, language and lack of budget, cost and access to Wi-Fi. One organisation commented that its policies and processes are not well documented because of the scale of operation does not make this easy and this was a limiting factor for them whilst going through the self-assessment process.

Figure 9 shows how organisations rated their satisfaction with the self-assessment process on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Only one of the participating organisations was significantly unsatisfied with the process and the majority (over two thirds) rated their satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5.   They said that it helped them to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work, helps with the implementation and management of their volunteering programme, identification of improvements, reflective practice and evaluation of work.

> *"It strikes a balance between objective and subjective elements – allows us to evaluate how we are doing against a common set of indicators. The only concern is that not all the indicators are applicable and organisations need to be able to credibly and confidently justify as such."* [International organisation]

Figure 9 – Satisfaction with self-assessment process by type of organisation
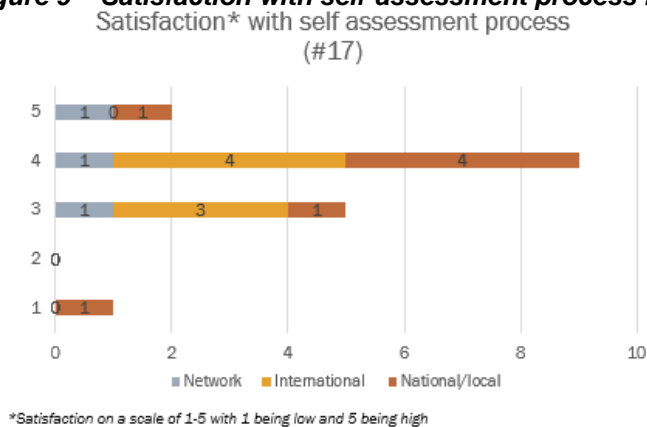
Areas identified for improvement included having the tools in French and also making them available in other local languages. There were suggestions that it may be helpful to merge certain sections, have categories for evidence types and have a "not applicable" option in acknowledgement that not all the indicators would apply to all organisations. Some participants felt that the standard was less applicable to informal and community volunteering and that it would be useful to review indicators to ensure that there is a strong fit for organisations that focus on working with volunteers in a more informal way. Case study 2 specifically explores the fit for e-volunteering and case study 4 explores the fits for community volunteering.

Some felt that it was important that coaching and support is made available for organisations as they go through the self-assessment process. One participant felt it would be useful to emphasise the importance of organisational buy-in for organisations considering undertaking the self-assessment process. Case studies 3 and 4 provide examples of building organisational buy-in.

Figure 10 shows how organisations rated the quality of the self-assessment guide on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Only one of the participating organisations was significantly unsatisfied with the process and the majority (over two thirds) rated their satisfaction at 4 or 5 out of 5.   Not all organisations had used the guide extensively as they felt that the tools were self-explanatory but those that had used the guide found it to be clear and comprehensive and they said that it helped them work though the self-assessment process.

> *"It is deep and comprehensive, extremely well structured and presented. I am impressed by the quality of this work"* [International organisation]

Suggestions for improving the guide included to make it available in French, making it more concise and to provide more detailed definitions. More detailed comments were offered by one participant who felt that a section on mentoring should be included.

Figure 10 – Quality of the self-assessment guide by type of organisation


Quality* of self assessment guide (#18)
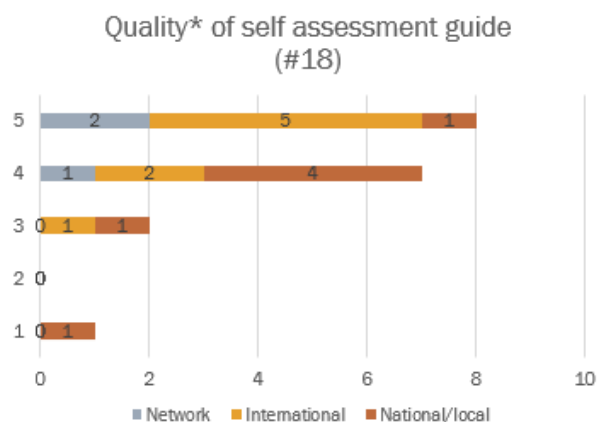
*Quality on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Figure 11 shows how organisations rated the accessibility of the self- assessment guide on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Whilst a third rated the guide very highly at 5, two thirds rated it at 3 or below for accessibility. Whilst some of the comments and reflections were specific to accessibility of the guide others focused more generally on accessibility and inclusion of the self-assessment tool as well.

There was a strong feeling amongst a number of participants that it needs to be made available in local languages as well as French. Some felt that the language should be simplified whilst others suggested that the indictors would benefit from being simpler. One participant felt that more indicators linked to inclusion and diversity would enhance the self-assessment process. Some suggested that there was a need to better reflect informal volunteering throughout in order to make the self-assessment more inclusive and relevant to all types of volunteering. One participant commented that it will be important to put the tools and guidance online to maximize accessibility. It was felt that more engagement, cooperation, exchange and sharing amongst organisations would support greater accessibility and inclusion.

Figure 11 – Accessibility of the self-assessment guide by type of organisation

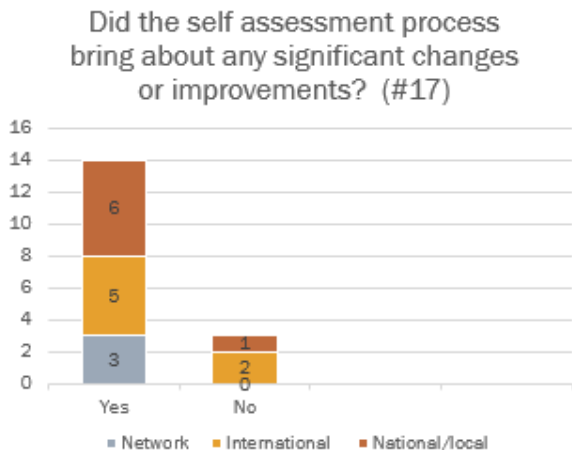Accessibility* of self assessment process and guide (#18)
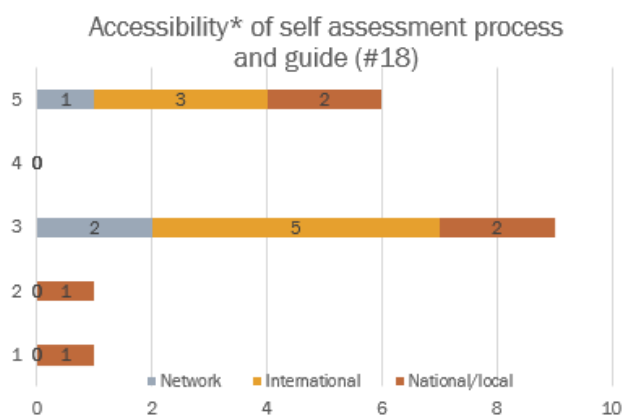
*Accessibility on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Participants were asked to identify if the self-assessment process has brought about any organisational changes or improvements. Figure 12 shows that for most participating organisations the process had brought about some change. For some it had improved vision, strategic direction and prioritisation of actions and for others it had made them more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. For some organisations the changes reported were about an approach to their work and they reported greater involvement of different stakeholders, introduction of a human rights-based approach and increased professionalism. Some said that the process had increased their awareness of the value of indicators and for others it had informed the questions that they ask of partners and volunteers. Some said that the changes were linked to specific work

areas such as an increased focus on mental health or tightened safeguarding and security practices. Case study 3 provides an example of embedding identified changes into organisational structures.

Figure 12 – Changes by type of organisation

Did the self assessment process bring about any significant changes or improvements? (#17)
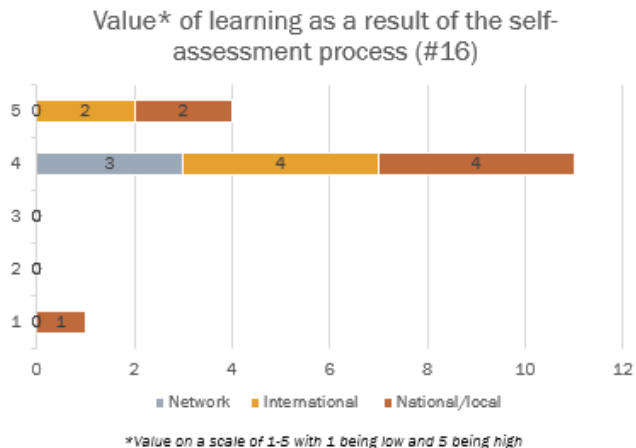
Organisational learning

All organisations said that they had experienced organisational learning as a result of going through the self-assessment process and some highlighted how they had benefited from the process of self-reflection:

> *"The standard really helped us to question ourselves and improve in the impact our actions should produce"* [Network organisation]

Figure 13 shows how organisations rated the value of the learning that they acquired as a result of the self-assessment process on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. All but one organisation rated the value at 4 or 5 out of 5. They valued the fact that the process helped them to see what they were doing well and at the same time identify areas for improvement.

> *"This self-assessment process was for us like a map that enabled us to "locate" ourselves in the space of volunteer activities. Knowing where we're at will certainly help us to plan priority actions that are better targeted in terms of available resources"* [National/local organisation]

Figure 13 – Value of learning as a result of the self-assessment process by type of organisation

Value* of learning as a result of the self-assessment process (#16)

*Value on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

All organisations said that they had identified areas for improvement through the self- assessment process and areas of improvement included improved practices and operating procedures, volunteer management, safety and safeguarding, data management, measuring impact, training, inclusion of volunteers and mental health.

Most organisations said that they had made changes as a result of going through the self-assessment process and these changes included organisational strategies, processes and documentation, formalisation of informal volunteering, prioritisation of mental health, approaches to inclusivity and setting up a committee to assess the impact of actions.

Some described challenges of putting identified changes into practice and these ranged from lack of buy-in from relevant parties, resistance from network members, limited resources such as time, budget and competing priorities, differing educational levels, communication challenges in contexts where access to the internet was limited, lack of access to reference materials and examples and lack of alignment between the self-assessment process and the project cycle. Case studies 3 and 4 provide examples of actioning identified change.

Figure 14 shows how organisations rated the usefulness of the learning action plan on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Fewer (13) organisations responded to this question which reflects the fact that not all had completed the plan at the time of completing the survey. Non-completion of the learning action plan was attributed to joining the pilot late, being faced with significant pressures brought about by COVID-19 or needing to reassess strategic goals in the light of COVID-19 which delayed the planning process. Of those that did respond, most (85%) rated usefulness at 4 or 5 out of 5. They said that it helped them to identify where to start and where to focus energy.

> *"This self-assessment process has changed our paradigm on the concept of volunteering and will certainly continue to revolutionalise our ways of working….in the various areas identified."* [National/local organisation]

One organisation felt that there should be a mechanism to hold organisations to account against the plan.

Figure 14 – Usefulness of the learning action plan by type of organisation
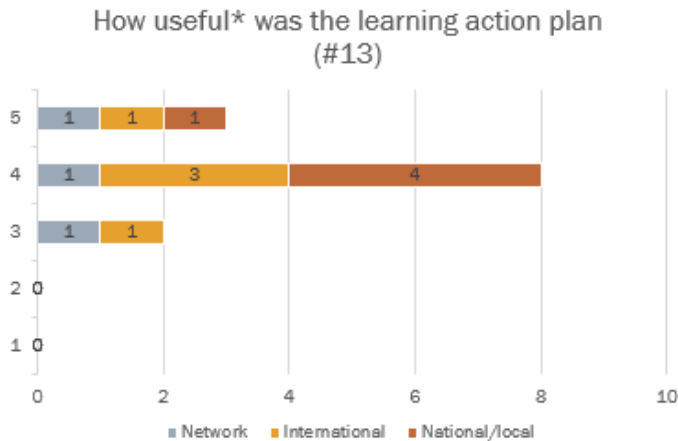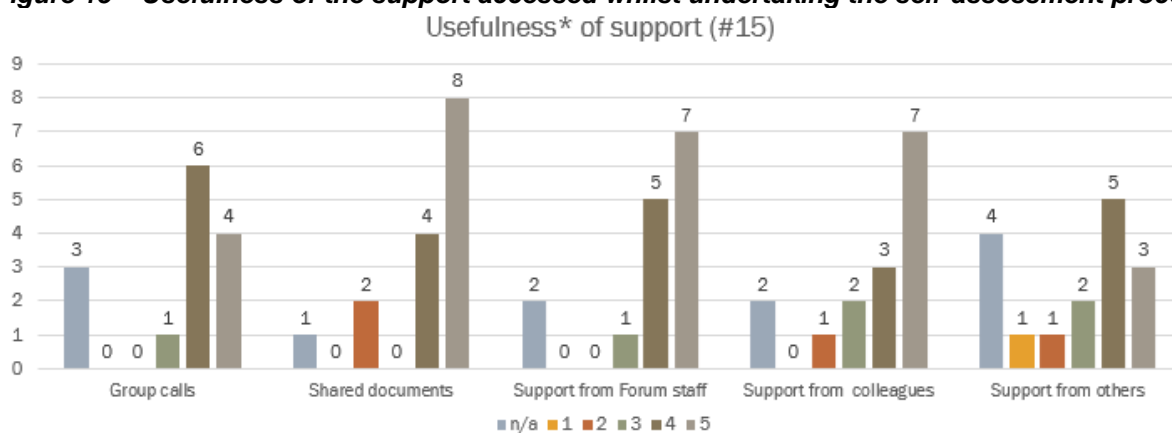

*Usefulness on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high

Views about support for organisations undertaking the self-assessment process

Figure 15 shows the types of support organisations had accessed when undertaking the self-assessment process and rated the usefulness of the support on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Fewer (13) organisations responded to this question which reflects the fact that not all had completed the plan at the time of completing the survey. Of those responding to this question, accessing shared documents was the most commonly cited form of support and group calls the least frequently cited. Shared documents, support from Forum staff and support from colleagues were more frequently rated at 5 compared to group calls and support from others. Generally, all forms of support were valued by participants.

Figure 15 – Usefulness of the support accessed whilst undertaking the self-assessment process

Participants were asked what support would be most useful to receive from Forum for organisations going through the self-assessment process in the future and they identified tutoring, basic training and case studies with examples of how the self-assessment tool can be used. Some said that follow up calls to share progress and updates would also be useful and others said they would value funding. Some highlighted the importance of having the support of a French speaker and also highlighted a need to access the documents in French and local languages. One of the case study participants felt that it would have been useful to go through a mock assessment so that organisations which are unfamiliar with self-assessment processes could have more direct experience of seeing how to use the tool in action (Case study 4).

Participants were also asked what support they needed form Forum to implement learning actions that emerge from the self-assessment process and they identified a need for practical tools, sample documents, case studies, free consultation, mentoring, regular check-ins, financial support and meeting to share and exchange good practice.

Conclusions

Many organisations taking part in the pilot found the standard and the self-assessment process to be very useful for identifying and initiating improvements in operational delivery of volunteer programmes. The self-assessment process had helped organisations to understand the strengths and weaknesses of their work, helped with the implementation and management of their volunteering programme, identification of improvements, reflective practice and evaluation of work.

The standard was felt to be less well aligned for some of the local and national organisations and those with a focus on informal and community volunteering. Some of these organisations reported finding the self-assessment process challenging and felt that the indicators were too onerous. Whilst some organisations reported finding the standard clear, other organisations felt that the language and terminology used within the standard and self-assessment process was complicated and unclear and the actions and indicators vague, making it difficult for organisations to use. This may reflect levels of previous exposure to tools using this type of structure and format which are relatively familiar in some countries and cultures and more likely to be new and alien to others. The issue about clarity was exacerbated in instances where organisations said they would have benefited from having access to materials in French or their local language.

Some organisations identified perceived gaps in the content of the standard. Areas identified included a section to evaluate the quality of relationships with organisations and partners supporting volunteer activities, a section on the efficiency of the use of available resources and something to support evaluation of what volunteers bring. Some wanted more on working with local volunteers and some identified a need for indicators on climate change, inclusion and social and environmental innovation. Whilst the standard was developed before the COVID-19 pandemic this has highlighted how the operating context for organisations can change over time which in turn highlights the need for a mechanism to ensure review of the standard over time.

Some organisations had benefited from focusing their self-assessment process on certain aspects of the standard where they identified a need for improvement. This approach has made the process more targeted and realistic. Other factors supporting the self-assessment process were motivation to improve, support from organisational leadership, support from colleagues, effective teamwork and planning and the timing of the exercise fitting well from an operational perspective. Barriers to progress with the self-assessment process included the language used in the standard, time pressures, resource limitations, challenges engaging with partner organisations or country offices and competing priorities especially pressures arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most participating organisations said the self-assessment process had brought about some change ranging from improved vision, strategic direction and prioritisation and increased awareness of strengths and weaknesses. All organisations said that they had experienced organisational learning as a result of going through the self-assessment process and some highlighted how they had benefited from the process of self-reflection. Areas for improvement identified included improved practices and operating procedures, volunteer management, safety and safeguarding, data management, measuring impact, training, inclusion of volunteers and mental health. Most organisations said that they had made changes as a result of going through the process and these changes included organisational strategies, processes and documentation, formalisation of informal volunteering, prioritisation of mental health and approaches to inclusivity.

Organisations valued the support that they had received as they undertook the self-assessment process including guidance notes and access to supporting documents and also the opportunity to have personal support and guidance from Forum. The opportunity to share ideas, challenges and progress with other organisations also going through the self-assessment process was very valuable. They felt that mentoring, case studies and a mock exercise would also be very useful for organisations going through the self-assessment process in the future.

In many respects the support needs of organisations going through the self-assessment process is the most complex consideration for the wider roll out of the standard as consideration needs to be given as to how these needs can be met. Support needs varied considerably across organisations with some finding the process clear and the structure of the standard familiar and straightforward whilst others struggled with both the content and elements of the structure. Supplying mentoring support to organisations is time consuming and will potentially have a significant resource implication.

Recommendations

Content of the standard

- In order to review the relevance of the standard for national and local organisations, it would be helpful to set up a task focused working group with a small number of national and local organisations and those who work with informal volunteers to review the content and identify possible adaptations. One option could be to produce a lighter version of the standard focusing on the core areas or, to make some of the key actions and indicators optional. It will however be important to explore this in more depth with representatives from organisations that fall into this category.

- There is a need to simplify the language used in the standard which would increase clarity and make it easier for organisations to engage confidently.

- It will be important to translate the standard and supporting documentation into French and other local languages to enhance accessibility.

- Consideration needs to be given to the inclusion of some of the areas identified as gaps in the standard with climate change, inclusion and social and economic innovation being notable examples. Whilst it may not be possible to include all the identified gaps it will be helpful to provide a rationale for including or not including identified areas.

- It is important to ensure that a mechanism is in place for reviewing the standard over time to ensure that it retains operational relevance.

The self-assessment process

- When rolling out and promoting the self-assessment process it would be helpful to emphasise the drivers that have supported the progress of organisations taking part in the pilot such as motivation to improve, support from organisational leadership, support from colleagues, effective team work and planning and the timing of the exercise. This will help organisations to prepare and position themselves to gain maximum benefit from going through the process.

- It is important to ensure that the self-assessment tool and guidance are made available in French and other local languages to enhance accessibility.

- It would be useful to consider introducing a "not applicable" option within the tool to help organisations focus on the relevant areas as they progress through the tool in acknowledgement that not all indicators will apply to all organisations.
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Organisational learning

- It is important to emphasise to organisations that their own needs must be at the heart of the self-assessment process and they can adapt use accordingly by focusing on the core areas of certain domains.

- It is important to promote the value self-reflection and assessment as a mechanism to support continuous improvement.

- Accountability for delivering change can be generated as a culture from within the organisation rather than relying on external accountability mechanisms.

Support

- It would be useful to assess the scale and profile of organisations that the standard is marketed towards in order to estimate the level of support that could be needed for organisations going through the self-assessment process.

- Consider developing a series of short YouTube videos to offer support for organisations in key areas.

- Consider the use of a buddying or peer support system where organisations identifying support needs as they go through the self-assessment process can access this support from an organisation that has already been through the process.

Case study 1: Selecting areas of focus
The Singapore International Foundation

Organisational context

The Singapore International Foundation (SIF) was founded in 1991 and currently works in eight Asian countries with programmes focusing on health, education, business and livelihoods, and cultural exchange; SIF also has a digital storytelling arm called Our Better World. Programmes promote the cross-cultural exchange of ideas and expertise to strengthen understanding, inspire action, and enable collaboration for positive impact in the communities where SIF works.

The SIF's Volunteer Cooperation programmes are enabled by volunteers from Singapore, who are deployed to work with host partner organisations in the countries of operation primarily in the areas of healthcare and education. During a typical year, SIF sends in the region of 300-350 volunteers overseas.

Motivation to engage with the standard and self-assessment process

SIF was involved in early stage conversations about the potential development of the Standard and through this process became convinced that self-assessing against a standard designed specifically for organisations delivering volunteering for development programmes could be a useful way to benchmark with other organisations and to identify areas for improvement and blind spots.

Approach to the self-assessment and learning action planning process

SIF's approach to the self-assessment process was to undertake a very quick initial review of the current performance of the organisation against all the indicators. This review highlighted two areas (duty of care and measuring impact) where staff saw opportunities to further strengthen organisational practice. This then enabled the team to be confident to put to one side the areas of established strength and focus on the areas where the greatest improvements could be achieved.
Similarly, with the learning action plan the team focused on areas that aligned to organisational priorities and disregarded areas which they considered to be either less relevant or less of an organisational priority.

A small team of three or four operational staff worked on the self-assessment and learning action plan. They worked closely with relevant colleagues on the details and then the team came together to consolidate the work.

For each of the two areas that SIF selected to focus on for this exercise, they developed a short survey that they sent to selected stakeholders. The survey asked respondents to rank perceptions of SIF's performance in several key areas and this feedback fed into the assessment process.

Factors contributing to success

The team felt that it would not have been realistic to undertake a deep dive across all four areas of the standard and felt that the approach taken helped them to direct energy towards the areas where the greatest improvements could be made whilst acknowledging that they could come back to the other areas at a later date.

Working with a small team with operational knowledge was helpful, especially give the time constraints of the pilot. The team found the validation survey with stakeholders a very useful exercise as it acted as form of external validation for their own internal assessment process and increased their confidence in the judgements made internally.

The timing of the self-assessment process worked well for SIF. The pilot coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic which facilitated the creation of operational bandwidth to take stock and reflect critically on their work, and the self-assessment tools offered a useful framework to do this.

Identified areas for improvement

The self-assessment process was helpful for raising awareness amongst the team and a number of specific actions linked to indictors were identified. One area identified for action was mental health. SIF identified a need to adapt pre-departure practices to incorporate mental health first aid content to better prepare volunteers for their placement. They also identified a need to better understand and meet mental health needs of volunteers during and after their placements, such as providing access to counselling services. In addition to this, as a result of the self-assessment process, actions have been put in place to work with external experts to undertake training on awareness of mental health amongst staff.

Documentation of outcomes and impact was something that the team had already been thinking about, but the self-assessment process has encouraged the team to increase participatory approaches into evidence collection processes and ensure that communities are engaged with validating outcomes. The team also identified a need to report on do-no-harm and use more overt SDG language in their reporting. A need to upskill staff research skills was also identified through the self-assessment process as the organisation is not in a position to appoint external researchers or evaluators so staff need to have the necessary skills to undertake this work internally.

Learning

The team felt that whilst the self-assessment tool and the processes were not difficult, there were some challenges with the language used for some of the indicators. There were differences in the way that team members interpreted the meaning of some of the indicators and this meant that they needed to spend time discussing to come to a shared understanding.

The team were pleased that they had focused in on specific areas as it helped to make the process realistic and they reflected that whilst this approach worked for them, other organisations could possibly benefit from focusing on the core areas rather than choosing two specific areas of focus.

> *"Don't feel as if you have to do everything. They are standards but the context varies for different organisations. You need to be honest and confident about where to focus, and this makes it less overwhelming. It's not that the areas aren't all important, just that some may not align with the organisation's priorities or nature of work as much."*

Whilst it was helpful to work with a small operationally focused team to undertake the self-assessment process, it was more challenging to develop the learning action plan with a small team as it can be difficult to identify relevant actions and at this point it would have been helpful, with more time, to get input directly from other stakeholders such as partners and volunteers. It would also be useful at this point also to check in with other organisations going through the self-assessment process and share ideas and learn from the existing practices of other organisations.

> *"Overall, I felt it was a good process and would encourage organisations to do this. We get caught up in our daily work and we might not reflect critically. It helped us think about how we should be doing things."*

Case study 2: Application for e-volunteering
Cuso International

Organisational context

Cuso International is a non-profit volunteering organisation, founded in Canada in 1961 and receiving much of its funding from the Canadian government. It mobilises volunteer professionals who work with local partners to amplify impact. Its work aims to advance gender equality, promote women and girls' empowerment and improve economic opportunities for youth. Its traditional approach has been to work with international volunteers on long-term placements building the capacity of partners. Since its establishment Cuso has worked in over 100 countries. Gender equality is at the core of all Cuso's work and programmes includes securing livelihoods, maternal and child health, sexual and gender-based violence, human rights and governance with a focus on the most marginalized communities including women and girls, indigenous, persons with disabilities and refugees and migrants.

Cuso works with a range of partners, including government, NGO, community-based organisations and networks. The majority of Cuso's volunteers are Canadian but it has also mobilized south-south, national and remote volunteers. International volunteers are recruited to long term placements and in reality the average length of placement is around eight months. In a typical year Cuso works with approximately 200 international volunteers. Engagement of e-volunteers has varied but over the last 5 years e-volunteers have contributed to over 2000 placements with partners.

Emergence of e-volunteering

Cuso identified that many international volunteers retain contact with and continued support to the partner organisations that they were placed with after their placement has ended. This, coupled with the tech explosion that has taken place over the last decade, encouraged Cuso to begin to explore the feasibility of e-volunteering and five years ago Cuso formally began to work with e-volunteers. It has been an effective way of expanding the range of volunteers that Cuso works with as e-volunteering can attract those who may not be able to undertake an international volunteer placement for family, work or personal reasons because of the flexibility that e-volunteering offers with volunteers being able to conduct the work at times that are convenient for them. On average e-volunteers' length of service is eight days which may be spread over a very short time or anything up to a period of six months depending on the project and the availability of the volunteer.

E-volunteering can create some challenging dynamics with partner organisations having expectations about working closely with the e-volunteer and the volunteer having expectations about the support and information they receive from the partner. Cuso has found that one of the most effective approaches to e-volunteering has been where e-volunteers work to support an international volunteer in country. This overcomes challenges with the cultural gaps that can be difficult to manage when working at a distance. Cuso has also been working with universities to develop e-classroom placements where students work as a group on projects designed by partner organisations or Cuso's country office.

Engagement with the standard and the self-assessment pilot

Cuso was involved directly in the development of the standard and was already very familiar with the standard and invested in it ahead of the pilot. The initial intention was to pilot the standard self-assessment process like other organisations but then it was suggested to Cuso that it may be useful to consider the application of the standard for e-volunteering. It was decided rather than go through the self-assessment process that Cuso would assess the standard for applicability to e-volunteering against its five years of experience of working with e-volunteers.

With the start of a new seven year volunteer cooperation programme, Cuso is going through a period of transition and reviewing processes and systems and there is a strong synergy between the areas that Cuso has identified for improvement and the areas covered in the standard.

> *"We needed to look at the volunteer journey and how to adapt things for the e-volunteer journey and this exercise was very helpful…we recognised that there are some things that are more important to include in the e-volunteering journey and some things that were just not necessary and this exercise with the standard was really helpful in identifying what these areas are."*

Applicability of the standard for e-volunteering

Whilst the standard has not been intentionally developed to align to e-volunteering, Cuso found that there was a fit across all four areas of the standard. Some areas of the standard whilst relevant, would need to be adapted for e-volunteers and some of the indicators were not relevant as they directly relate to volunteers being on the ground, such as some of the safety and security indicators. Generally, Cuso considered the standard has a high degree of relevance for e-volunteering.

Challenges of applying the standard to e-volunteering

Cuso is an international organisation working in many countries but for a smaller organisation perhaps wanting to begin work with e-volunteering and use the standard, it presents many things to think about which could be intimidating and overwhelming. It is important to ensure that the tool is simple and that there is understanding of its purpose and how it can be used.

Cuso considered that in order to say it meets the standard as an organisation it would need to assess against the standard in every country which is quite a significant task.

Learning and reflection

This section illustrates some examples of the learning and reflections that Cuso identified through the exercise. It should be noted that this is however not a comprehensive list.
When considering the design and delivery of projects there is a tendency not to think about the potential of remote support though e-volunteering. There is a need to give more consideration to this when developing partnerships and recognise that the placement needs to be designed differently if the volunteer will not be in country. For e-volunteers the placement needs to be more task focused rather than role focused.

Thinking about training for partners this needs to be different to prepare them to work with e-volunteers. Partners may not have the tools or software to work with e-volunteers and may need training in the etiquette of working remotely. Similarly, e-volunteers may have high expectations of being provided with the information they need, level of communication and responsiveness of partner organisations and these expectations need to be managed to make relationships more productive.

International volunteers receive five days of training whereas e-volunteers receive a handbook but no formal training and there are no checks to monitor if they have read the handbook. There are training modules that could be adapted for e-volunteers to help with this.

International volunteers are offered a debrief and exit interview and there is not an equivalent process for e-volunteers, but it would be useful to get feedback from them in some format to improve how the organisation works with e-volunteers.

There is an employment assistance programme that is offered to international volunteers for support with stress, anxiety and managing any personal issues. At present this is not offered to e-volunteers but there is a recognition that they may also need support.

There is a clear child protection policy for international volunteers but consideration should be given to remote volunteers who may be put in contact with vulnerable communities and thought needs to be given what safeguarding systems need to be in place to assess and manage these risks.

Partner organisations are encouraged to have regular check-ins with international volunteers and this, along with the complaint's procedure helps to pick up issues early. Whilst this procedure can apply to e-volunteers it has not been highlighted to partners and e-volunteers that this process and procedure can apply to them. It is important that e-volunteers are clear where to go for support.

There is a chain of impact for international volunteers but scope for improvement to link the work of e-volunteers into the wider project objectives. This is helpful for both volunteers and partners as it is helpful to see how their work links to the bigger picture. Also, the data collected on international volunteers is much more comprehensive than the equivalent data for e-volunteers.

Case Study 3 – Team involvement and embedding the learning

VSO Rwanda

Organisational context

VSO has been operating in Rwanda since 1998 and currently delivers programmes across all 30 districts of the country in inclusive education, inclusive sexual and reproductive health for young people and vulnerable groups, and disability inclusion in development. Work is delivered through partners in civil society and government agencies to activate and mobilise volunteer networks for community mobilization, representation, outreach and service delivery.

Volunteers provide technical input in to programme design, support national level advocacy, and are at the frontline of community level interventions. VSO international volunteers with specialist skills provide concentrated input in to programme design, content, and delivery. National and community volunteers provide links to local actors and communities. Impact is maximised by blending volunteer types and forming teams of volunteers with different backgrounds and roles. Since 2017, VSO Rwanda has worked with over 250 volunteers per year.

Motivation to engage with the standard and self-assessment process

VSO Rwanda was invited to be part of the global pilot of the standard. As the host country for the International Volunteer Conference (IVCO) in 2019 as well as Youth Connect Africa (YCA) in 2019, the Rwanda team was highly motivated to play a role in leading the improvement of quality volunteering especially for young people. The team is keen to deepen its volunteering for development approach and sees the standard as central to helping them achieve this. There was a hope that the assessment would help to identify strengths to build on as well as addressing weaknesses. More specifically they hoped the process would help the team to ensure volunteers are well supported and motivated, support safeguarding and duty of care practice and identify how to capture and demonstrate the added value of volunteering to development outcomes.

Approach to the self-assessment and learning action planning process

The team used a four-stage approach which began with an initial workshop that provided an overview of the Global Standard, the process of self-assessment and how to use the self-assessment tools in practice. Staff then formed four self-assessment groups aligned against the four areas of the standard. After undertaking the self-assessment process the groups reconvened at a second workshop to feedback on the experience of self-assessment, consolidate learning and agree actions resulting from the learning established. It was at this second workshop that the learning action plan was completed. Each group identified learning and a minimum of three actions they would take forward to improve practice and outcomes. The fourth stage was the implementation of the learning action plan.

To help bring about identified changes, the team is now planning to embed the actions into processes and team and departmental priorities. Whilst an action plan has been developed, the specific actions will be embedded in ongoing work so that it is not seen as a separate activity. It is also important to identify synergies between the standard and other VSO approaches especially PMD Pro, Social Exclusion and Gender Analysis, MILE, safeguarding protocols, business development and the emerging work on feminist leadership. Most of the standards can be achieved through existing and emerging VSO approaches.

Factors contributing to success

The process benefited from having a clear focal person in the country office who worked closely with VSO global colleagues to ensure the process was well planned, delivered and followed-up. Global colleagues had prepared extremely well to facilitate the discussion with the Rwanda team. All of the Rwanda team participated in the process of the self-assessment which meant all views and perspectives were included. The team was divided into groups to consider one dimension of the standard each. The process benefited from having colleagues from the teams most relevant to the area as well as colleagues from other teams to give a different angle and an element of challenge. Another positive factor was that many of the Rwanda team were very familiar with other global tools and approaches used by VSO and could see links between these and the global standard. For example, PMD Pro, Social Exclusion and Gender Analysis, MILE, safeguarding protocols, business development, and the emerging work on feminist leadership.

Identified areas for improvement

The self-assessment process facilitated learning and identification of action across all four areas of the standards. For example under the design standard it helped to identify a need to do more to actively include primary actors in the design of programmes, the need to embed consultation with children and young people into the work, and the potential to utilise existing platforms to gain community feedback. It also identified the importance on ongoing due diligence with partner organisations, the value of involving more staff in risk analysis and the importance of holding reviews with partners to reflect on improvements in programme implementation.

Under the duty of care standard, whilst risk assessment, safeguarding and child protection risk is being done there were some gaps identified in both training and identifying risks to the community. Similarly, under the managing volunteer standard gaps were identified in volunteer induction and the involvement of partners in the process of recruitment and induction.

Under the measuring impact standard, whilst the organisational approach to monitoring was seen to align well to the indicators set out in the self-assessment tool, it was felt that he involvement of communities was limited by the ways impact is measured. It was also identified that there is a disconnect in the way existing planning and reporting structures link to the SDGs. There is also a lack of assessment of partners' monitoring and evaluation capacities before the start of partnership implementation.

Learning

The team found that that generally the content of the Global Standard was relevant to their work. Overall, VSO Rwanda reported that as a result of the self-assessment process the team has a much better internal understanding of different functions across the country office and areas of our practice that need improvement as well as areas of strength. It has also helped to deepen their understanding of volunteering for development as VSO's development approach. Going through the assessment process had built team confidence to roll out the tools with partners with the aspiration of building the capacity of partner organisations and influencing national policy through advocacy initiatives.

The team considered that the self-assessment process was easy to understand, the self-assessment tool was easy to use and that staff gained a better understanding of their practice through the self-assessment process. Additional support and guidance was needed for staff carrying out the self-assessment process, both scoring and understanding results to extracting learning. It was important that when working on the self-assessment that this is a collaborative process across all teams and levels of staff.

There were some reflections that the standards were more targeted towards VSO at a global level rather than an individual country office, and also that they aligned more to international volunteers rather than national volunteers.

Instead of seeing the standards as something 'separate' or additional, it is helpful to consider how far the standards are or could be achieved through existing processes and approaches and not inventing new

systems. It is also important to ensure as many of the team participate as possible to maximise full participation, insights and ownership going forward and to invest in time to complete the process.

Case Study 4 – Application for community volunteering

National Forum for Advocacy Nepal

Organisational context

National Forum for Advocacy Nepal (NAFAN) is a network organisation which was formally established in 2004 working with a range of community based organisations and NGOs. NAFAN's mission is to influence, shape and plan, policies and decisions in political, social, economic and environmental areas. Its goal is to promote and initiate national action that supports and strengthens individual advocacy goals through collective advocacy and information sharing. The work targets indigenous communities and marginalised groups and spans various thematic areas such as environment, sustainable development, human rights and peace building.

NAFAN promotes community volunteerism across its 22 network members encouraging communities to engage in their own development. It works across 14 districts of Nepal and works directly with over 100 volunteers in addition to a large number of community volunteers.

Motivation to engage with the standard and self-assessment process

NAFAN was first exposed to the work on the standard at a volunteering for development conference in Bangkok two years ago. This ignited an interest and staff engaged in conversations about how they may be able to become more involved. Whilst NAFAN perceived that there may be challenges in meeting the standard as national organisation with a strong focus on community volunteering, there was an interest to see how the work may be able to identify gaps, build organisational capacity and enhance processes for working with volunteers.

> *"We had some sense that we were not in line with the standards because we were talking about volunteering in a different way…. but what we realised is that we can assess ourselves to identify gaps so that we can provide some support to volunteers and that will strengthen our volunteering process."*

Approach to the self-assessment and learning action planning process

NAFAN began the work by meeting with board members and the staff team to introduce the standard and set the scene without presenting the detailed areas or indicators. This presentation was used to emphasise the importance and potential value of the standard. This was a challenging meeting and lots of questions were raised. Many of the questions were about whether there would be money available to support the process and the challenge was to encourage those present to think about the potential intrinsic value to the organisation of making improvements. It was also helpful to be realistic about the fact that there may be some limitations about how much of the standard would be relevant and achievable for NAFAN.

The proposal to take the assessment forward was agreed at the initial meeting and a series of follow up meetings were planned. At the first follow up meeting the details of the standard were shared along with the indicators and the team began to work through them. This proved to be a very slow process because people were unfamiliar with this type of document and working with indicators and also because the document was not available in Nepali which was a significant challenge. In order to increase the efficiency of the process for subsequent meetings a decision was made for three people to take time to understand and familiarise themselves with the document and identify which areas were most relevant to NAFAN. These individuals then went on to facilitate the team through the rest of the self-assessment process and this was a much more focused and enabled the team to move much more quickly. Separate meetings took

place with the board, the staff team and partners. The meetings with the board and staff members were used to work through the indicators whist the meeting with partners was used to present the standard and the outcomes of the self-assessment process. After these meetings a learning action plan was developed which recognised that some areas could be identified as priorities and fed into activities over the next six months whilst other areas could be considered further into the future.

Factors contributing to success

Whilst there was a lack of confidence at the outset that there would be a good fit for the standard for a nationally based organisation working with community volunteers, the view was that it has been a useful process. It was helpful to identify the areas of the standard that are of most relevance to NAFAN and focus on changes that could be identified and actioned in these areas.

> *"I was not expecting that it would help us in the beginning. We were talking about community volunteering and the standard has been developed in a different way not reflecting more traditional community volunteering. That was my imagination. After engaging in the process what I realised is its totally open, it's a broad standard. We can use these standards for our own context, its not focused on corporate volunteering or international volunteering. We can use the same standard with indigenous organisations as well, it doesn't have to be just for large organisations. We can use it as a reference and assess our own work."*

It was helpful to identify a small team to lead on the process. They familiarised themselves with the standard and acted as facilitators and this really helped to provide focus and speed up the process.

Identified areas for improvement

A number of gaps were identified, and the action plan was developed considering these gaps against the capacity and needs of the organisation. The first gap identified was the need to make connections and linkage between the work that NAFAN is doing through its project activities and the sustainable development goals. Another area identified for action was the production of policies for the recruitment, roles and responsibilities of volunteers and linked to this, developing policies to support the health and well-being of volunteers. Another area identified for improvement was the monitoring and evaluation systems which enable NAFAN to demonstrate progress and impact of its work. Some of these identified actions have now been carried out and health and safety policies are in place.

Learning

At the outset the standard was presented to pilot organisations but it might have been helpful as well as presenting the standards to work through a mock assessment so that organisations that are unfamiliar with this type of document and process can see how it works.

It was helpful to identify key staff to facilitate the team through the process but the success of this rested heavily on the capacity of those individuals to understand the documentation, the self- assessment process and indictors. Staff taking on this role need to be keen to learn and committed to making improvements. It was also very helpful for one of these staff members to attend a Forum meeting with other organisations taking part in the pilot.

Some of the standard was not relevant so it was important to focus on the areas of greatest relevance and where the changes with the greatest potential for impact could be made. The concepts within the standard are useful and need to be adapted to the organisational and country contexts.

Within Nepal the trade union movement takes a stance that workers should be paid and that volunteering is a negative thing. NAFAN have been involved in the instigation of a national volunteerism policy which will be presented to the government to counter this view. The document has been drafted using the learning from this process.