

REPORT FOR FORUM MEMBERS

A NEW DAWN:

Strategic Pathways for the Future of Volunteering in Development

Written by: Nick Ockenden



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About Forum

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) is the most significant global network of organisations that work with volunteers to achieve sustainable development goals. Forum exists to share information, develop good practice and enhance cooperation across the volunteering in development sector. Forum achieves this through convening, research, and standards.

For more information and to join Forum, visit forum-ids.org.

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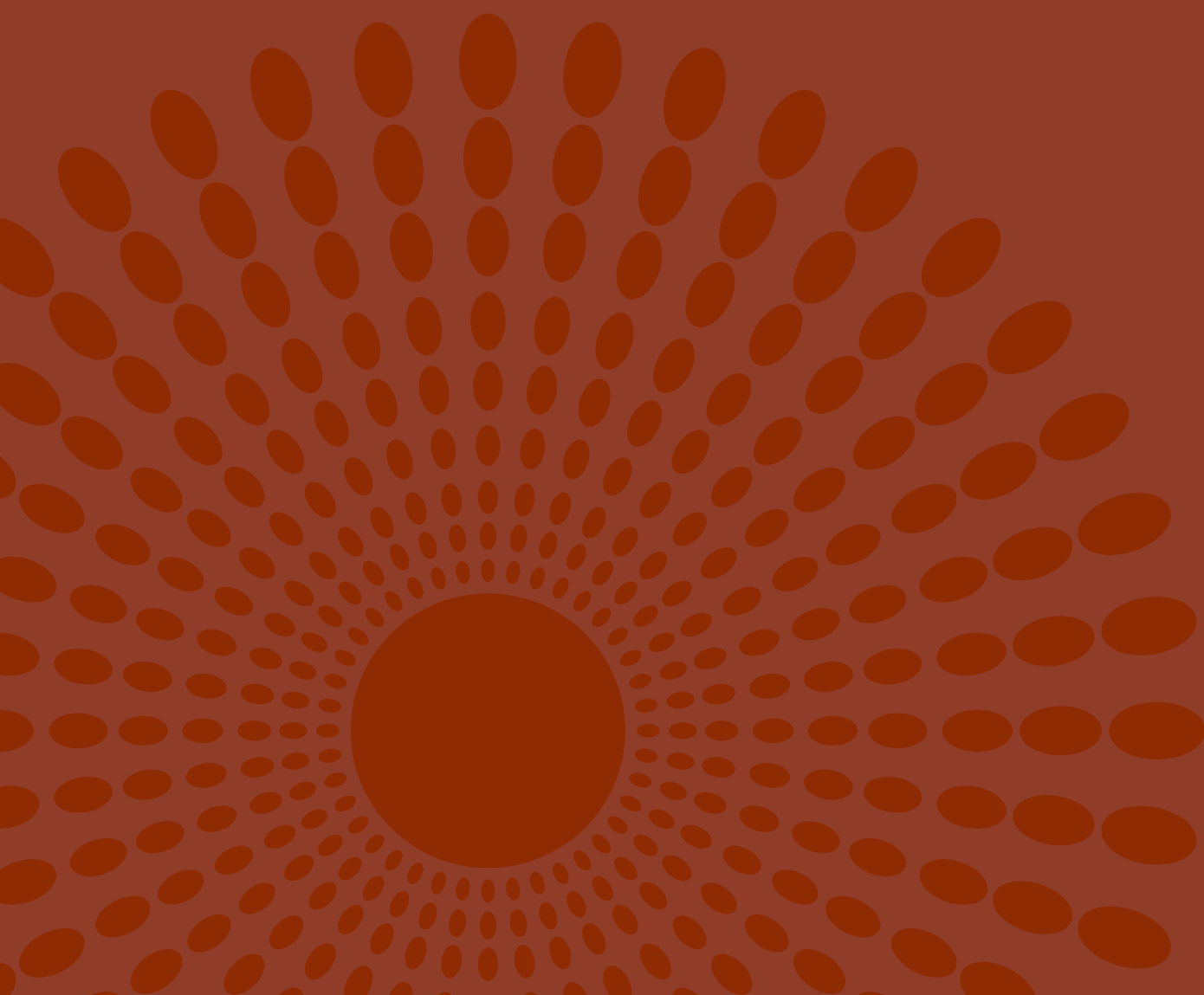
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REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF VOLUNTEERING IN DEVELOPMENT



Background

The world is changing rapidly. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about both challenges and opportunities for Forum and its members. Resources have been affected and in-person volunteering disrupted, but there have also been great strides in innovation and agility. This takes place alongside an ever-strengthening global movement for climate justice, greater recognition of the need for localisation, changes in how people volunteer and what organisations and communities need, and much more. It is vital that the upcoming activities and strategic direction of Forum's members – and Forum itself – are rooted in the collective wisdom of the network and the wider sector. This will ensure their relevance, facilitate continued effective collaboration with one another and with the communities in which they're based, and enable the continued development of a movement of global citizens working for a world in which no one is left behind.

This strategy will help guide Forum members in their journeys over the next three to five years, offering a pathway to help prioritise and effectively navigate the post-COVID-19 environment. Based on multiple conversations with Forum members and external stakeholders, the implications presented in this strategy have been collaboratively developed. It does not seek to replace or replicate the many organisational strategies Forum members already have in place, but rather, aims to present higher-level and unifying issues. Furthermore, this strategy does not replace Forum's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan but builds on it; it has a wider focus, aimed at the Forum membership rather than Forum itself. Many of the good practice principles mentioned in this strategy, however, do complement those described in *Forum's Global Volunteering Standard (2021)*¹. The project's formal aims and objectives are listed in Appendix A.

Forum membership comprises organisations that work, through volunteering, to achieve sustainable development. These include both large, well-established non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as those that are smaller and newer. It also consists of organisations that are very closely connected to government departments and, in some cases, are agencies of their governments. This inevitably affects not only the nature of their work but also the extent to which they have direct control over their strategic direction and the changes they can make to their programming. Therefore, some of the considerations described in this strategy will be more relevant and easier to implement for some members than others.

1. <https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard>



The Strategy Development Process

This strategy included the following stages:

- » A review of relevant research reports and strategy documents.
- » Conversations with 31 Forum members (46 individuals) from May to July 2022. Interviews were held and recorded in Zoom, lasting approximately one hour each.
- » Conversations with 10 external stakeholders, which again were held and recorded in Zoom in June and July 2022, lasting approximately 45 minutes each.
- » A July 2022 workshop with 22 Forum members (25 individuals) to share emerging findings from the conversations and collaboratively think through what they meant for future work. Feedback from an additional three members unable to attend the workshop was also incorporated.

Details of the organisations and individuals spoken to during this work are included in Appendices B and C. All Forum members were invited to participate.

While all members and stakeholders who participated in this process have been acknowledged, no comments in the strategy are attributed to individuals or organisations.

The Strategy

This strategy is structured around five themes² that outline the key issues, challenges and opportunities facing members:

01 Responding to and learning from the pandemic.

02 Addressing decolonisation.

03 Tackling wider trends.

04 Evolving approaches to volunteering programming.

05 Developing Forum as a network.

Each section sets out possible considerations for members when developing their work over the next three to five years. It is not, however, designed to be a rigid set of instructions that cannot change over the next five years. Planning horizons are shorter than in the past, and this strategy is designed to be a live document that can be adapted by members as their operating environments inevitably change.

2. These themes emerged through the analysis of the conversations.

1.

Responding to and learning from the pandemic

A. MEMBER RESILIENCE, FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION

All members shared how they had successfully adapted their volunteering provision during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they had learnt a great deal; many said their volunteering programmes are now stronger than pre-COVID and they did not want to return to business as usual. Organisations were often praised by donors for their flexibility and adaptability during COVID and equally tried to innovate and test new ways of working, a mindset that seems set to continue post-pandemic.

While adaptation and agile working were critical, the presence of informal local volunteer networks was a notable contributor to success in many instances. Their presence helped ensure continuation of programmes when international volunteers were repatriated, allowing these members to more quickly resume their programmes once travel restrictions eased. It also means organisations with such a presence may be well-positioned to respond to future crises. However, there was also recognition that for some members, an ability to survive in the future may only be feasible with the continued support of donors and many members remained clear-sighted about the importance of funding.

The fact that all members spoken to had survived the worst of the pandemic, albeit in different forms, is testament to their resilience, hard work and commitment during one of the most challenging times for themselves and the wider sector (although many mentioned partner organisations that no longer existed, and one longstanding Forum member ceased operations in early 2022). Without risking complacency, there is good reason to believe members would be capable of withstanding another major shock in the future (again, this would be, to varying degrees, influenced by donor behaviour).

Recent research by the International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) concluded *'ongoing change and uncertainty are the likely hallmarks of a future'* and *many organisations will 'seek to survive'*.³ Surviving is not, however, the same as thriving – and COVID has had major negative impacts on some members and the organisations with which they partnered. Members often described, for themselves and also for their partners, greatly reduced income sources, suspension of activities and uncertainty about volunteer recruitment in the future. Moreover, the operating environment remains challenging for many members because they are dealing with much more than the effects of the pandemic. The cost of living and economic crisis, the effects of the Ukraine war on government budgets and challenges in recruiting long-term volunteers in many Northern countries all conspire to make the landscape uncertain and unstable.

3. See <https://leadership4vol.iave.org/key-findings/>

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Members should be confident that they are working effectively enough to strategically innovate in the future, continue to improve and persuade donors they can be trusted to do so in the future. It is critical that innovation is not only carried out in times of crisis but also in periods of stability.
- At the same time, there is no space for complacency, and COVID-related learning should continue to be built upon and shared. One of the key learnings from the pandemic appears to be to act quickly with key decisions.
- Invest in horizon scanning and foresight work to continue to understand the changing environment as best as possible.
- Continue to demonstrate value with donors and do not take for granted their understanding of the work and its changing needs.

B. COVID-19 AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

The pandemic forced members to make rapid changes to their programming, most notably by increasing national and South-South volunteering⁵; introducing and expanding e-volunteering provision; forming new partnerships, especially for advocacy work; and focusing on impact and evidence work. Members described how many of these developments had long been in the pipeline, but the pandemic provided an urgent reason to introduce them and for donors to accept them. In many cases, the changes seem set to become permanent even when COVID has long passed. While efforts continue to be made to ensure donors do not backtrack on often-significant progress, some do not appear to be completely convinced of all the changes. More widely, COVID has potentially acted as a catalyst for further shrinking space (see also 1c). In some instances, governments have used lockdowns as an excuse to further restrict civil liberties and to target opposition.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Work closely with donors, especially those who are more sceptical, to help increase their understanding that the changes made in response to the pandemic should not be seen as temporary measures to survive, but as a long-term evolution of how volunteering in development functions. The limits to what members can influence needs to be borne in mind, however, and efforts should be made to continue to understand the motivations and agendas of donors, especially government funders.
- Have the confidence to not apply for future donor funding if their values do not match those of the member. This is perhaps most relevant for issues of the value of the contribution of national and South-South volunteers, although potential for hierarchies and inequalities within these forms of volunteering should also be considered.⁵

4. For some members, this was often the only option available after the repatriation of their international volunteers, and often led to a considerable increase in national volunteering and informal help within communities. National, community and informal volunteering is not, however, new in and of itself.

5. See <https://rgs-ibg.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/geoj.12243>

C. OPENING UP THE CONVERSATION BEYOND COVID

The pandemic is not over, its effects to last for years to come, but there was a strong sentiment that now is the time for Forum and its members to discuss other important topics. There is a real risk that the impacts of concerning trends such as shrinking space, the rapidly changing role of technology, the cost-of-living crisis, anti-globalisation, altering work and leisure patterns, and conflict and migration could be sidelined. Indeed, Ipsos' *'What worries the world'* research continues to show concern over COVID declining globally and issues such as inflation and poverty becoming more important⁶. Many of these issues were relevant well before the pandemic and members feel they need to get back on track to discuss them, whilst also identifying and responding to emerging trends.

Forum members have also demonstrated, admittedly with a huge amount of effort and resources, they can successfully navigate COVID, in many instances emerging even stronger⁷. The lessons learnt must be kept in mind as there remains more to share (and no one suggested ignoring COVID ever happened), but now is the time to create space for discussion of other issues, both inside and outside of Forum.

It is important, however, to recognise COVID remains outside of members' control. A major new mutation that necessitates global lockdowns will ultimately decide whether it remains a dominant talking point for Forum. Furthermore, and as discussed in section 1a, we need to recognise COVID has had and continues to have a major negative impact on many members' financial sustainability and health. Many are still recovering and may not in fact be stronger than before the pandemic, particularly within those countries experiencing shrinking space.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Make space for the discussion of other topics but do not ignore the ongoing evolution of COVID, the learning gained to date and the journeys undertaken by members.
- Re-engage with major, important and long-term challenges such as shrinking space and think critically about how this will affect volunteering in all its forms and possible responses.
- Continue to work with and support members and partners that have been especially hard hit by COVID and are taking time to recover. The collegiate nature of Forum remains a key strength, and further work is required to mitigate COVID's longer-lasting negative effects.

6. Concern over the pandemic continues to decline, as Coronavirus stays at eighth position. This is the third month in a row that it places outside the top five concerns': <https://www.ipsos.com/en/what-worries-world-may-2022>

7. The 'COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering in Development' research report found that 70 per cent of respondents felt their organisation had handled the response to COVID well: <https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Forum-Survey-Report-COVID-19-and-the-Future-of-Volunteering-for-Development-1.pdf>

2.

Addressing decolonisation

A. CO-PRODUCTION WITH COMMUNITIES

Members supported moves to decolonise volunteering in development and saw it as a priority – but there was some debate about how to make it a reality. There was awareness that it needed to move beyond a talking shop and that it could not be dictated by Northern countries. There was also appreciation that it involved some very challenging and sometimes existential questions: What is the place of North-South volunteering? Why are volunteers from the North often valued differently than those from the South? How can structural barriers to South-North volunteering be addressed? To what extent do Northern members need to consider new organisational structures? Furthermore, members felt decolonisation is linked to the identity and roots of Forum as a network (although this is currently being addressed, amongst other things, with the recent inclusion of national members).

There was, however, agreement that successful decolonisation needs to be based on co-production (also referred to as co-creation⁸), in which the agency of all partners is recognised and facilitated. Communities need to dictate what they need and how volunteers can be involved, and members need to listen to and act on what they hear. Kyle Whyte's 2019 research⁹ with Indigenous communities, for example, stresses the need for consent, trust, accountability and reciprocity when working together, noting '*colonialism, capitalism and industrialisation*' have worked against these principles. This also supports moving from vertical models of volunteering to horizontal partnerships based on collaboration and '*supportive solidarity*', as Bianca Fadel argues in her 2021 IVCO thinkpiece¹⁰. Furthermore, Denise Ferreira da Silva argues we need to see '*the end of the world as we know it*¹¹' to address issues of inequality and colonialism, requiring fundamentally different ways of understanding, talking and behaving. In such a context, a future scenario sees South-North volunteering on the current scale and agency of North-South volunteering as a valid destination to aim for. This would further explore what reciprocity looks like on a global scale and, over time, would shift the dominance and influence of post-colonising countries to a more equitable footing. Furthermore, it could work toward greater solidarity and knowledge exchange.

The challenge remains how best to ensure previously excluded voices are heard in a genuinely collaborative process and how to navigate wider structural barriers that are out of members' control (e.g., immigration policies, reductions in aid spending). Once again, understanding and addressing power imbalances and power relations remain critical steps to effectively address this issue.

8. The Global Volunteering Standard sets out a commitment for '*collaboratively designed and effectively delivered volunteering the development projects which respond to community need*': <https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard/?/>

9. <https://wires.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wcc.603>

10. <https://forum-ids.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/IVCO-2021-Think-Piece-Decolonising-Thinking-and-Practice-of-Volunteering-for-Development-%E2%80%93-Bianca-Fadel.pdf>

11. <https://www.textezurkunst.de/en/articles/interview-ferreira-da-silva/>

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Prepare to be comfortable with being uncomfortable. Addressing decolonisation and pursuing co-production with communities should involve difficult and challenging conversations, some of which may question the purpose of members' work and their established ways of doing things. Dismantling existing practices and organisations may not be necessary immediately but continuing as normal is also not an option. What is required is a process of incremental change, reflection and learning.
- Continue advocacy with donors and partners in the North to demonstrate the value of co-production with local communities. These discussions can be framed within the wider context of decolonisation of aid.
- Ensure arguments and discussions are based on up-to-date academic thinking and theory but work to ensure they remain practical and are not seen as overly academic. It is important that actions feel practical and deliverable rather than disconnected and remote theoretical debates.
- Northern-based organisations should challenge themselves on how they are structured to deliver their work and programmes. Review and adapt pay and organisational structures where relevant (i.e., dual-pay structures replaced by single-pay structures; where and how the organisation is headquartered and whether devolved structures might work better; the balance of Southern staff and voices throughout organisations, especially in senior management positions).
- If co-production is already taking place, critically ask how inclusive the approach is and whether those currently involved in conversations genuinely represent the communities, especially those that may be more excluded or marginalised.
- Connect to other agendas with a global identity (e.g., the climate crisis) that can help organisations and governments pursue a global, unifying agenda.

B. THE CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION OF NORTH-SOUTH VOLUNTEERING

Members felt that decolonisation, localisation and co-production do not, however, mean an end to North-South volunteering and that organisations should still be confident of its value and contribution¹². There are, of course, positive and negative forms; when based on genuine partnerships with communities fully involved in decisions about what volunteers do, it can be highly beneficial.

Voluntourism is one form of North-South volunteering, and members discussed how it contrasted with their programming and had potential to cause harm to communities. This was primarily due to widespread

12. Recent research by Northumbria University and VSO into blended volunteering discusses the benefits to involving international volunteers alongside national volunteers: https://www.vsointernational.org/sites/default/files/2022-07/Final%20Report%20%28with%20Executive%20Summary%29_VSO%20Blended%20Volunteering%20Research%20%28March%202022_Final%20branded%29.pdf

perceptions that 'voluntourism' was often commercial in nature, could ignore safeguarding and security, was too short to have a meaningful impact and frequently prioritised the needs of the volunteer (or customer) above those of the community.

Members wanted to sufficiently distinguish their placements, especially those shorter in duration, from voluntourism to avoid any confusion or blurring. They felt concentrating on good onboarding and debriefing, training, nuanced concepts of development and partnerships with communities in their shorter-term placements clearly indicated their offer was not a form of voluntourism. There was, however, recognition that in giving priority to the volunteer's motivations and wishes, voluntourism programmes often present an attractive and marketable offer to prospective volunteers. Members felt they could learn from this, without risking slipping into commercial models.

These debates often took place in the context of many members finding it more challenging to recruit long-term volunteers from the North. This could be associated with low unemployment rates in some countries, meaning options for paid work may be more attractive than volunteering.

It also concerned the type of opportunity. The role of issues-based activism and volunteering was discussed, with movements like Fridays for Future cited as one example. Members recognised their organisations tended to offer more highly structured volunteering opportunities and many people, especially those who are younger, may want to 'do good' through more informal networks. Indeed, Generation Z was noted to want shorter-term engagements and could find the prospect of long-term (i.e., multi-year) placements unattractive. Members therefore noted the need for better intelligence on what younger people want from volunteer experiences and how trends such as inflation and the cost-of-living crisis are likely to affect the flow of volunteers for longer-term placements. This is not about wholesale shifting to shorter-term opportunities, but rather seeing this as a blended approach between face-to-face and digital engagement (see also section 4a).

The most successful examples of North-South volunteering appeared to be where it was seen as part of a blended model of provision and where the volunteer journey was valued and understood (see sections 4a and 4b).

While of considerable value, North-South volunteering also highlights embedded power imbalances and wider societal inequities. While most members chose to repatriate their international volunteers during COVID as an appropriate response to protect their health, it also shows the privilege at the heart of much volunteering in development – people volunteering from Northern countries are often able to evacuate in times of crisis whilst local communities have little or no choice but to stay. Indeed, even the notion that someone has a choice to volunteer or not and travel to a (typically) economically poorer community is a position of privilege and power. North-South volunteering still has an important place in volunteering in development, but it can be further developed by viewing it through the lens of decolonisation, recognising and acknowledging the part played by privilege, power and inequality, and challenging long-held concepts and assumptions.

13. Generation Z refers to those born after 1997, i.e., those aged 24 and under at the time of this strategy's publication.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Recognise power imbalances and issues of equity between volunteers from the North and South, even when programmes are designed with care.
- Critically review the need and value of short-term volunteering placements and whether they may start to blur with more commercial voluntourism opportunities (this does not refer to short-term placements that may be repeated over a period of time or placements that may be complemented by remote forms of volunteering).
- Rather than see voluntourism organisations as adversaries, explore opportunities to exchange mutual learning and good practice between the two fields. The volunteering in development sector can, for example, learn more about how to make opportunities attractive to prospective volunteers whilst voluntourism could gain much from the good practice principles of the Global Volunteering Standard. This will help make volunteering in development programmes as attractive as possible in the context of difficulties in recruiting long-term volunteers and improve the quality of voluntourism.
- Consider how North-South models could be embedded within blended models of volunteering and how they connect to volunteers from the South or with national volunteers.
- Ensure all North-South volunteering is well-designed and based on co-production with local communities and partners. The Global Volunteering Standard contains good practices that can be drawn upon, but members running North-South volunteering should also reflect on their programmes in light of debates on decolonisation and localisation, as many already are.
- Consider how to link up with and learn from issues-based networks and movements and why they appeal to some people more than highly structured and longer-term volunteering opportunities. Valid differences between these two forms of engagement should nonetheless be recognised and respected.

C. ACKNOWLEDGING THE SOFT POWER OF VOLUNTEERING

International volunteering programmes funded wholly or partially by governments are a form of soft power¹⁴. There are increasing examples of nations using volunteering in this way, with members specifically citing China's recent expansion of programmes throughout the Pacific and the U.S.- although its long history was also recognised. Soft power also needs to be considered in the context of anti-globalisation trends and examples of reduced trust in government foreign policy motivations and actions¹⁵.

14. Soft power in this context refers principally to programmes run by organisations based in northern countries, as they tend to dominate this form of volunteering. As more countries expand their volunteering programmes internationally, however, it could also theoretically apply to Southern countries (although power imbalances would still likely be implicit).

15. In the context of the United Kingdom, the British Foreign Policy Group's (BFPG) Annual Survey of UK Public Opinion on Foreign Policy found that 51 per cent of Britons 'actively distrust' the government on foreign policy, the first year in which a majority have answered as such: <https://bfpg.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/BFPG-UK-Opinion-Report-June-2022.pdf>.

This does not, however, need to pose a problem. If volunteering programmes are well-designed and delivered – and if there is appropriate trust between the organisation and government, with an ability to speak truth to power and be heard – they can still be highly effective. Indeed, while wider research often recognises this as *'a tool of soft power of dominant nation-states'* (Jackson and Adarlo, forthcoming), the reality can often be more complicated. The volunteers surveyed in this research were *'hardly dupes of the [American] government'*¹⁶; it was not problematic simply because it was soft power. This does, however, require acknowledging. We need to better understand the motivations, roles and place of large government donors and agencies and the potential of such programmes to influence the policies and practices of other countries.

Relations between members and governments tended to be mature and respectful, whilst also challenging. As such, an awareness of government agendas is also important, particularly in terms of the distinction and blurring between policy, politics and ideology. This was especially true of members who were currently funded by supportive and sympathetic government departments but also aware assumptions and relations could quickly change with a new, typically more right-wing, administration.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Continue to speak truth to power and invest in good relationships with government donors. This will also involve advocacy and more difficult and challenging conversations.
- Continue to advocate for progressive approaches to government-funded programmes.
- Horizon scan and undertake foresight work to understand how a change of government administration could affect investment and policy direction of volunteering programmes.
- When appropriate, facilitate opportunities for government employees to come into Forum member spaces (e.g., IVCO) so they can better understand the nuances of the issues and the value of what members do.

16. See https://www.academia.edu/19696699/Soft_Power_Selfishness_or_Altruism_Motivations_and_Satisfaction_of_US_Based_International_Volunteers

3.

Tackling wider trends

A. THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Members are aware of the climate contradictions at the heart of their work: the generation of carbon when sending volunteers overseas and, as discussed in the *'Volunteering for Climate Action'* IVCO 2022 paper¹⁷, the notion of sending volunteers from countries that dominate global CO2 emissions to help tackle the climate-related problems of countries in the South.

It is clear members hold themselves to higher standards than many and recognise everyone has a part to play in addressing the climate crisis. Members have been undertaking reviews and audits of their climate impact and, while the direct impact of COVID may be limited in the sense that travel has recommenced, they are taking a more critical view as to who should travel and when. Additionally, some members have moved to greater reliance on longer-term placements that involve fewer flights over a set period, although others have not been able to do this due to the location of the volunteers' placements (i.e., on smaller oceanic islands). Members are also in the process of further strengthening their climate work, particularly in relation to marginalised communities and groups.

Members also recognise addressing the climate crisis is not as simple as stopping their volunteers from flying. While it would have a positive effect on carbon emissions, it would also run against the principle of people-to-people interaction and solidarity underpinning the sector, which would be an enormous loss. Furthermore, volunteering in development has huge potential to positively address many of the worst aspects of the climate crisis despite its role in contributing to carbon emissions. Many members have been focusing on climate-resilient projects (on the ground and through advocacy, campaigning and awareness-raising) for many years and continue to achieve a great deal. There remains, however, some debate as to whether the volunteering in development sector, compared to other more damaging sectors, should seek to reduce CO2 emissions.

The climate crisis has, perhaps more than any other issue in recent memory, unified large portions of society, especially young people, in action. Movements such as Fridays for Future were discussed as highlighting the range of ways in which people can choose to participate in causes important to them, often in contrast to the more highly structured volunteering opportunities offered by members (see 2b). This also demonstrates the value of understanding the wider context within which people volunteer (or participate) and how seeing their involvement as a journey can be beneficial (see 4b).

17. <https://forum-ids.org/ivco-2020-paper-3/>

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Continue to examine opportunities to make organisational and programmatic practices and systems more sustainable. This includes critically engaging with a new, more streamlined approach to travel for both staff and volunteers whilst recognising the importance of people-to-people interaction and defending its contribution. Members also need to explore ways to make the climate emissions of volunteer flights less damaging, such as focusing on longer-term placements when possible and valuable.
- Further focus on and potentially expand work seeking to tackle the climate crisis in both volunteering programming and advocacy. This should only be done when it fulfils the organisational mission and there is appropriate expertise, rather than risking mission-drift.

B. TECHNOLOGY AS AN ENABLER AND THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The main way in which technology has affected members in recent years has been through expansion of e-volunteering provision. While this may not be a long-term change for all, it has nonetheless shown how rapid changes in technology can allow people to participate in different ways. Lockdowns and travel restrictions during COVID meant online volunteering often replaced face-to-face volunteering provision. Research by IAVE found nearly two-thirds of respondents said they had '*moved from supporting face-to-face volunteering to online volunteering*¹⁸' during this period. The same report, however, noted it is not a binary choice, especially if technology is used creatively and innovatively (see section 4a on blended volunteering opportunities).

Members frequently described how e-volunteering had helped diversify their volunteer group, opening it up to people who were not able to travel due to disabilities or work or family commitments. They discussed how more economically disadvantaged communities often did not have the resources to volunteer overseas, especially for long periods, and may not even be aware of such opportunities. Members were, however, also acutely aware of the digital divide and how technology and e-volunteering could exacerbate existing inequalities. Indeed, Chadwick argues that further investment to address digital access, particularly for women and marginalised groups, is necessary if technology is to enable participation¹⁹.

This is also a broader debate than whether e-volunteering is useful or not. Wider technological changes in society have a significant – and often rapid – effect on how people get their news, engage with work and leisure, and choose to volunteer or not. Spending more time online and 'doing good' remotely, for example, may affect people's desire to volunteer physically and whether they feel it is necessary and useful.

18. <https://leadership4vol.iave.org/key-findings/> Survey respondents were described as 'VLO [volunteering leadership organisations] members and potential members of IAVE's Global Network for Volunteering Leadership'. Seventy organisations were included in the analysis.

19. <https://leadership4vol.iave.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Future-Trends-in-Volunteering-Briefing-Paper.pdf>

Technological changes also continue to impact how organisations manage their data and finances, or communicate and engage with stakeholders through social media and online. This holds enormous potential to streamline processes and make them more efficient but also creates major risks such as data breaches and online security.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Ensure e-volunteering programmes are developed with access in mind and an awareness of who can participate and who may be excluded. Practical issues of internet access need to be considered (especially for rural areas), whether such provision is exacerbating existing divisions in society and how people may want to get involved (e.g., motivations between different generations of volunteers).
- Undertake foresight work to improve understanding of how people's lives are affected by wider technological developments and how this could impact their decision to volunteer or engage with good causes (see section 4b). This would seek to better understand how technology can enhance members' work and programmes' impact, and where it can act as a barrier.
- Ensure online security and data protection policies and practices are up-to-date and effective plans are in place for breaches of volunteer (and other) data.

C. SHRINKING SPACE, CONFLICT AND SECURITY

'Not all members mentioned shrinking civil society space as an issue, but the backsliding of democracy and civil rights was seen to be a critical issue by many. Section 1c has already highlighted this topic as a critical issue that could risk being ignored if COVID remains the sole issue discussed. The worsening of the environment in many of the countries in which members have a volunteering presence has long been an issue and is likely to remain a challenge in the future. Shrinking space was most commonly discussed in relation to countries in the South but it is also increasingly relevant to many Northern countries where the rise of populist and nationalistic governments has come with greater restrictions on NGOs and their citizens.

Members recognised the civil, human and democratic rights of the countries they partnered with and worked within were outside of their influence. However, they also described the practical impact such trends had on their work. Some had to think carefully about whether they were safely and meaningfully able to continue their volunteering programmes in certain locations and several had stopped, though this was more often associated with insecurity than with shrinking space (although the two are frequently linked). Members also described how it affected the nature of their volunteer activity, understanding it was not possible for volunteers to work on issues that could be perceived as overtly political or contentious. Finally, some members noted it had become

harder for NGOs to register with their governments in some countries, potentially making it more difficult to identify partners in the South and host organisations.

Members with experience in involving and working with national volunteers described how this increased options in terms of where they could have a volunteering presence. National volunteers were often able to access more insecure locations to which international volunteers could not travel. Advantages such as local knowledge and cultural awareness were discussed, but this was also affected by Northern donors' unwillingness to place international volunteers in certain locations. While this is a practical issue of who may be able to have the greatest impact and of safeguarding, it again raises questions of power imbalances and differences in how volunteers from the North and the South may be valued.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Make space for discussion of the impact of shrinking space and insecurity within Forum and share good practice and solutions to challenges between members.
- Share insight and knowledge on rapidly changing situations in-country between members whenever possible.
- Adopt a holistic approach to consideration of shrinking space, acknowledging it is affecting, albeit in different ways, countries in the North as well as the South.

4.

Evolving approaches to volunteering programming

A. DEVELOPING A BLENDED APPROACH TO VOLUNTEERING

Recognising the diversity of people's motivations and the myriad problems addressed, members knew they could not offer only one volunteering model, which was observed in two primary ways.

Firstly, in isolation, e-volunteering was often not felt to be enormously beneficial and could not replace face-to-face volunteering, with the exception of its application during COVID-related lockdowns when the latter was not always possible. Its real potential was realised when it was part of a blended model in which some face-to-face volunteering was also provided; in doing so, it could draw in a wider group of volunteers, reach new areas and extend the engagement between communities and volunteers.

Secondly, organisations often had considerable success offering a blend of North-South, South-South and national volunteering, drawing on the strengths of each²⁰. The research by Northumbria University and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) notes this helps to develop shared ownership of projects, again demonstrating the value of volunteering that is co-produced and co-created (see section 2a). Members also found this to be a useful way to bring reticent donors along the journey. Several described donors, however, who were yet to be fully convinced of the value of national volunteers when their programmes were set up to benefit citizens of the Northern country. A possible way to shift the discussion is to focus on the outcomes for the communities in the South as the ultimate objective, rather than on the impact on the volunteers.

COVID also helped demonstrate the value of national and community volunteers, who were often able to continue work while international volunteers were repatriated²¹. It is important to recognise national volunteering is clearly not new and communities have been doing this for generations; it may simply be that interest in this form of volunteering (especially from the North) has recently increased.

Once again, issues of power imbalances are important to consider, with members discussing the challenge of how to engage volunteers from the South on an equal footing to those from the North, when wider structures and assumptions are frequently set up to directly or indirectly benefit the latter.

20. See research by the Northumbria University and VSO into blended volunteering: <https://www.vsointernational.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/VSO%20Blended%20Volunteering%20Research%20%28March%202022%29.pdf>

21. See 'COVID-19 and the Future of Volunteering in development': <https://forum-ids.org/covid-19-and-the-future-of-volunteering-for-development-research-report/>

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Prioritise a blended approach to volunteering when appropriate, positioning North-South volunteering alongside and complementary to national and South-South volunteering.
- Pursue e-volunteering if it adds value to volunteering programmes and outcomes for communities and volunteers. It should not be developed simply because others are doing it or because it had value during the pandemic when face-to-face volunteering was not possible.

B. FRAMING THE VOLUNTEER'S EXPERIENCE AS A JOURNEY

Members frequently mentioned how they did not 'own' their volunteers and how volunteers could dip in and out of opportunities and change their form of engagement. Volunteers are often more fluid than we may expect, engaging with a cause rather than an organisation. Recognising and facilitating moves between organisations, to partners and allies, but also between types of 'giving' (e.g., online and face-to-face but also giving time and giving money) can be highly beneficial.

Understanding a volunteer's pathway through their volunteering experience and what their journey looks like can help create a better experience for the volunteer, increase the likelihood of engaging them in the longer term and help co-production with communities²². As addressed earlier in this strategy, members noted it was becoming harder to recruit long-term volunteers from Northern countries. Placing the volunteer's experience in its wider context and as part of a journey can boost understanding of the extent to which factors such as (un)employment, cost of living, or wider life events – such as caring for children or parents – can trigger someone to start volunteering or limit involvement, and how these can change over time.

CONSIDERATIONS:²³

- Build on existing approaches to supporting volunteers along a lifelong journey and seek to understand the impact and influence of external factors, triggers, barriers and life events on their engagement.
- Examine ways to help connect and link volunteers between different organisations.
- Examine the diversity of the volunteer population and ask who is not participating and why. Understanding the resources required and wider structural barriers to taking part can help make policies more inclusive and widen the volunteer base.

22. See, for example, 'Pathways Through Participation': <https://www.involve.org.uk/resources/publications/project-reports/pathways-through-participation>.

23. See 'Pathways Through Participation' for further recommendations: <https://www.involve.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/Pathways-Through-Participation-Volunteering-Briefing-final.pdf>. While this did not focus on volunteer for development, there are numerous transferable lessons.

5.

Developing Forum as a network

A. THE DIVERSITY OF FORUM MEMBERS AS A STRENGTH AND CHALLENGE

Forum's membership has changed considerably in recent years, most notably with the addition of national members. This has been universally welcomed by those spoken with and is seen to add value to the network as a whole, helping to move Forum away from the dominance of large, Northern (and often Commonwealth) organisations and countries and also as a means to more closely connect to issues on the ground. There is support for further expanding this constituency of members.

This diversity does, however, create some challenges about how the network can be meaningful to all members and what its unique identity is. It was often felt, for example, that discussions led by larger organisations could be too far removed from the reality of smaller, national organisations. Furthermore, the potential to blur the focus of Forum with that of IAVE was often discussed, particularly as the latter focuses explicitly on national volunteering organisations²⁴.



24. Discussions between Forum and IAVE are ongoing and an MOU is being developed to distinguish the work of the two organisations' networks.

Practical challenges are also present in a global network such as Forum, which has members spread across all time zones. Participation in group meetings can be especially difficult for North American members due to very early start times. There is recognition that compromise is necessary but also support for hosting separate meetings to boost attendance. Further barriers can be language (English is dominant but many members are French-speaking, as well as Portuguese) and cost of attendance at IVCO conferences.

This is not an argument against the inclusion of national members but to consider how to facilitate a network that thrives on diversity and has mechanisms in place to ensure relevance to different subsectors.

CONSIDERATIONS:

- Continue discussions with IAVE about the unique contribution of each organisation and build on the MOU in development.
- Continue to explore ways to make participation across the network more equitable (e.g., subsidised places at IVCO, the focus of discussions and sub-networks).
- Build on the mapping exercise of potential members and partners to establish new relationships and further diversify the network.
- Consider holding additional meetings to allow greater participation from members in North America but balance against the benefit of having a wide selection of members present.
- Explore further options for the translation of events and publications into non-English languages, especially French and Spanish.

B. EVIDENCE OF IMPACT AND THE RESEARCH AGENDA

The pause on volunteering during COVID meant many members could take a step back and look at the value of their programmes and boost their evidence of impact. The chance to consider a wider perspective and ask why members did what they did and what difference it made was seen to be hugely valuable. Taking stock of and critically questioning approaches and remit were simply not possible during usually busy delivery periods. There was also widespread recognition members need to do more when talking with donors about the difference their volunteers make; they recognised donors could not be expected to simply understand the value. The fact that research, evidence and impact assessment were commonly discussed likely reflects the priority that Forum gives to research, something widely valued by members.

First, members considered **what** the subject of research is and where gaps in knowledge exist. For many, this was the contribution of national volunteers and raising awareness of their impact, including how countries in the North can directly benefit. There is a need for research that compares different models and forms of volunteering. Furthermore, gaps in knowledge include the motivations of Generation Z (see 2b), the experience of host organisations and longstanding issues that have not recently been discussed due to the dominance of COVID, such as the impact of shrinking space and of evolving technology on international volunteering (see 1c). Members also discussed the value of undertaking fewer, larger pieces of research that could combine resources (for example, longitudinal research examining the long-term impact on volunteers and communities).

Members also spoke of the value of shifting the research focus to look at outcomes (the difference made to people's lives) and less on inputs and outputs (the number of volunteers), which can lead to a more sophisticated understanding of the value of volunteering in development and an openness to adopting new methods if they are the most effective way to achieve the outcomes. More conceptually, this also concerns why we undertake research and who defines the wider research agenda and the questions asked. Is, for example, research being undertaken to provide evidence for an advocacy position or to better understand whether particular models of development work do or do not work? Or to what extent has the historic dominance of Northern academics and Northern volunteer-sending organisations established a particular language and lens through which volunteering is viewed, and is this relevant or of interest to researchers in the South?

Secondly, it concerns **how** research is undertaken. Development research has long since advocated the importance of participatory research, which is undertaken *with* and not *on behalf of* communities²⁵. While a huge amount of good practice is evident, the voices of practitioners and communities need to be included²⁶. There are further opportunities to undertake highly creative and peer-led forms of research that are engaging and often radical in nature, alongside more traditional forms of research.

And thirdly, it is about **who** is involved in the research. Wider research identifies the dominance of the North in international development research, with one major review finding that only 18 per cent of publications in the 2010s were penned by Southern academics²⁷. This was recognised by members spoken to, one of whom felt the North was the de facto producer of new knowledge while the South remained on the periphery; members wanted to see a diversification of researchers and more Southern voices and contributors. It may not, however, be sufficient to distinguish researchers as simply being from the North and South Without risking a debate about these terms, many researchers may move to new locations globally and it is perhaps more about seeing a global community of researchers and asking how well-connected those conducting the research are to the issues and topics they're exploring.

25. The Global Volunteering Standard notes that impact measurement should be done with 'organisations, partners, volunteers, and communities working together': <https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard/?/>

26. See <https://www.participatorymethods.org/page/about-participatory-methods>. An example of using more innovative, participatory and inclusive research methodologies is the Refugee Youth Volunteering Uganda (RYVU) project (<https://www.rvyu.org/>), which included training young refugees as researchers. See also https://www.researchgate.net/publication/353978454_Ethnographies_of_Volunteering_Providing_Nuance_to_the_Links_Between_Volunteering_and_Development for a discussion of the contribution of ethnographic research to volunteering and development.

27. <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/northern-institutions-dominate-international-development-research-so-what/#comments-wrapper>

CONSIDERATIONS:²⁸

- Facilitate opportunities for Southern partners and voices to meaningfully participate in Forum's research agenda and ensure they can bid for and undertake work on an equal footing. Working with new (Southern) regional and national networks would be a good way to reach researchers. In addition to opening up the community to these researchers, it will be important to find ways for them to collectively define the broader research agenda, the topics to be researched and the methods used. Any research agenda, like this overall strategy, must, however, be flexible and able to be adapted and evolve as the wider environment changes.
- Critically ask why research is undertaken, what its purpose is and who is involved. There are also opportunities to build engagement in participatory and peer-led research; for example, by facilitating access to capacity-building with local universities.
- Pursue research gaps on topics that have a potential impact on volunteering in development but may have traditionally been considered outside of the sector and its sphere of interest – for example, the impact of shrinking space and of evolving technology on volunteering in development. This will involve new partnerships with researchers and funders in different fields and academic disciplines, and Forum has a role in helping to facilitate their involvement.
- Continue to take stock and ask why members do what they do and adapt programmes and delivery accordingly. This work should take place regularly, not only during times of crisis.

28. While referring to economic development research, the Partnership for Economic Policy's call for action for an increase in Southern researchers contains useful practical steps: <https://www.pep-net.org/call-to-action>.

Conclusion: making a new dawn for volunteering a reality

This strategy has sought to draw together the diverse views of Forum's members and external partners. There has been much in common and inevitable differences of opinion. In addition to the points discussed above, four unifying themes surfaced again and again, albeit in different forms. Keeping these themes in mind as members move forward with their work

1. CO-PRODUCTION UNDERPINS EVERYTHING

For volunteering to evolve in the most useful and effective way, it needs to be done in genuine collaboration with the communities it works with. Members should not only consider how volunteering programmes are designed and delivered, but also how research is conducted. This is not about telling communities what should be done, but instead, working in partnership. There is an enormous amount of good work already underway, but it is an evolving journey and members need to continue to challenge themselves and each other.

2. IT'S ALL ABOUT POWER

Wider structural power imbalances and relations underpin much of what was heard in the conversations about members' work and future plans. Whether this concerns issues of decolonisation, how members are organisationally structured, or how volunteers from the South are perceived and valued compared to those from the North, these are critical issues that affect how members can practically move forward. Advocacy will play a critical role, especially for structures outside members' control, but this is also a process of self-interrogation and reflection for members, much of which will – and should – feel uncomfortable.

3. RE-VALUING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF INFORMAL AND COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

This may be the dominant form of volunteering globally, especially in the South, but our views of what it is, its value and how it can be facilitated tend to be viewed through a Northern lens. There is agreement that informal and community volunteering needs to be an active part of blended models of volunteering for members, but its history and unique nature also need to be recognised and not formalised in line with dominant perspectives of what volunteering in development looks like (i.e., highly structured).

4. NARROWING THE GAP BETWEEN WHAT WE SAY AND DO

Members consistently took the issues discussed in this strategy seriously and were, to varying degrees, prioritising work on them. They agreed issues such as decolonisation and the climate crisis required fundamentally new ways of working and thinking. There was, however, often less agreement on the practical ways of addressing this, with a perceived gap between desires and action (i.e., what members say they want to do and what they actually do). None of this is easy. Meaningful responses often pose uncomfortable and existential questions about the value and mission of some members, and incremental progress may be more meaningful than reactive and major changes of direction. This may remain the biggest challenge facing Forum's members – but also the biggest opportunity. There is a genuine desire to evolve, and dialogue is a sound first step. The most important consideration at this stage of the journey may be to continue these often-difficult conversations, ensure topics stay on the agenda and work together as a network to hold each other's feet to the fire.



APPENDIX A: AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of this work was to support Forum's member organisations to plan a five-year strategic path, helping them better understand where they could best focus their priorities and resources in the face of great change.

The project's objectives were to:

1. Collaboratively explore and identify the opportunities and challenges facing Forum members and Forum itself over the next three to five years.
2. Develop recommendations that would maximise effectiveness and positive impact, and highlight key existing workstreams that could deliver even more.
3. Clarify how Forum members could best leverage their collective identity as part of the network to respond to the changing environment and future challenges, whilst also delivering on their own organisational priorities, and how Forum itself could support this journey.

APPENDIX B: FORUM MEMBER CONVERSATIONS

1. ActionAid Hellas – Gerasimos Kouvaras (Country Director)
2. Australian Volunteers International (AVI) – Melanie Gow (CEO)
3. Centre for International Studies and Cooperation (CECI) – Philippe Dongier (Executive Director) and Nancy Lafrance (Manager of the Volunteer Cooperation Programme)
4. CNV Mozambique (National Volunteer Council of Mozambique) – Deedar Massingue (Vice President)
5. Comhlámh – Dervla King (Interim Head) and Chris O'Connell (Capacity Building and Volunteering Quality Project Officer)
6. ComMutiny – The Youth Collective (CYC) – Ashraf Patel (Co-Founder)
7. CorpsAfrica – Liz Fanning (Founder and Executive Director)
8. Crossroads International – Heather Shapter (Executive Director)
9. Cuso International – Yvette Macabuag (Manager of International Volunteering / Acting Senior Manager Volunteering in Development)
10. France Volontaires – Lucie Morillon (Director of Studies, Communication and Advocacy)
11. Habitat for Humanity – Allyson Drinnon (Director, Volunteer Resource Center)
12. International Bureau for Children's Rights – Cathy Launay-Alcala (Director of Operations and Programmes), Dimitrina Raby (Deputy Director of Operations) and Emmanuelle Parent (Voluntary Programme Coordinator)
13. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) – Satoshi Kadowaki (Program Officer, Strategy and Program Operation Division, Secretariat of JOCV), Yuko Asakura (Acting Director, Office of Strategic Partnerships and Intergovernmental Affairs) and Ryo Imamura (Deputy Assistant Director)
14. Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) – Mihyun Kim (Program Officer)
15. Netzwerk und Fachstelle für internationale personelle Zusammenarbeit (AKLHÜ e.V.) – Gisela Kurth (Director) and Wanja Amling (Advisor International Personnel Cooperation)
16. Norwegian Agency for Exchange Cooperation (NOREC) – Helge Espe (Senior Advisor) and Tomod Nuland
17. On Call Africa – Michaela Rossmann (Volunteer Engagement Officer)
18. ONG AVES – Selom Agbavito (Executive Director)

19. Oxfam-Québec – Denise Byrnes (Executive Director / Directrice Générale)
20. Peace Corps – Ted Adams (Program Specialist), Kris Besch (Country Director Sri Lanka), Sarah Dietch (Director of Peace Corps Response), Jackie Dinneen (Deputy Chief of Staff), Faith Halaiko (Director of Communications), Jennifer Hawkins (Manager of Business Operations and Knowledge) and Nyassa Kollie (Senior Recruiter)
21. Serve Global – Tariku Negash
22. Singapore International Foundation (SIF) – Jean Tan (Executive Director)
23. Solidarité Union Cooperation (SUCCO) – Jean-Alexandre Fontin (Program Officer – Volunteering Manager)
24. Unité – Raji Sultan (Secretary General)
25. Volunteers Involving Organisations Network (VIONet Sierra Leone) – Samuel Turay (National Coordinator)
26. Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) – Stephen Goodman (CEO)
27. VSO – Philip Goodwin (CEO)
28. World University Service of Canada (WUSC) – Chris Eaton (Executive Director) and Erin Bateman (Director, Volunteer Cooperation Program)
29. Yayasan Sukarelawan Siswa (YSS) / Student Volunteers Foundation – Fazirah Nural (Project Executive, Centre of Volunteers Effort and Excellence) and Sathish Rao (Chair of Board)
30. Zavod Voluntariat – Katja Celin Yere (Acting Director)
31. Zimbabwe Workcamps Association – Ratherford Mwaruta (General Secretary)

APPENDIX C: EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER CONVERSATIONS

1. Action for Sustainable Development – Oli Henman (Global Coordinator)
2. African Union – Dr. Meshesha Shewarega (Coordinator, The AU Continental Volunteer Platform)
3. Global Affairs Canada – Susan Pereverzoff (Director at the Global Citizens Division)
4. Helene Perold and Associates – Helene Perold (Director)
5. IAVE – Nichole Cirillo (Executive Director)
6. Leeds Beckett University – Elisa Burrai (Senior Lecturer in Tourism Management) and Davide Sterchele (Senior Lecturer in Events Management)
7. Network of African Voluntary Organisations (NAVO) – Oneka Munanairi (Executive Director)
8. Northumbria University – Matt Baillie-Smith (Professor of International Development)
9. United Nations Volunteers – Emma Morley (Chief, Volunteer Advisory Services)
10. University of British Columbia – Vanessa de Oliveira Andreotti (Professor, Canada Research Chair in Race, Inequalities and Global Change, and member of the Decolonising Futures Network)