

IVCO 2022 Think Piece

VOLUNTEERING THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERSECTIONALITY TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES:

THE EXAMPLE OF VOLUNTEER-GEI FROM THE SOUTH
AS AGENTS OF INCLUSIVE SOCIAL INNOVATION

Ingrid Adovi and Olga Houde,
Le Programme de coopération volontaire Compétences,
Leadership, Éducation (Programme CLÉ)



IVCO
SENEGAL 2022



INTERNATIONAL
BUREAU
FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

OFICINA
INTERNACIONAL DE
LOS DERECHOS DEL NIÑO

المكتب الدولي لحقوق الطفل

Faced with the COVID-19 related constraints, South-South volunteering has taken off.

The Volunteer Cooperation Programme 'Competencies, Leadership, Education' (Program CLÉ), funded by Global Affairs Canada and implemented by a consortium made up of Fondation Paul Gérin-Lajoie, Éducation internationale and Fédération des cégeps, is no exception to this trend.

This article discusses the benefits of bringing together volunteers from diverse backgrounds from an intersectional perspective, particularly for strategic mandates such as gender equality and inclusion (GEI).

The geographical origin and the cultural baggage of volunteers influence their ability to quickly master certain issues, codes, socio-cultural norms and other realities specific to a host society. This ability may be greater for a volunteer from the Global South, given their cultural proximity to certain communities and organisations in the country of assignment. Volunteers from the South are therefore experts who can easily be involved at the centre of a co-creation process with partners, quickly establishing a climate of trust and mutual respect. They thus contribute to transformational changes that are sometimes more profound and lasting. This is particularly the case when deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, such as those related to gender, are affected in the context of international volunteering.

Gender is another identity factor that can influence a volunteer's ability to act as an agent for social change. For example, a male volunteer from the South can advocate and, in some respects, symbolise positive masculinity by acting as an ally at the heart of a dynamic of social transformation.

Ingrid Aдови, gender equality and inclusion volunteer with the CLÉ Program in Bénin, writes -

To see a man, who works for gender equality and inclusion, may seem exceptional, rare, even "Western" behaviour.

What to do in a socio-cultural context that is not conducive to the development of girls, women and people who are particularly vulnerable and marginalised?

I combine technical knowledge, know-how and above all interpersonal skills with the context. My trick lies in communication, adaptation and the choice of terms used to convey different messages that can facilitate social and behavioural change.

It is about starting from the socially accepted model in the communities to deconstruct social norms, stereotypes and prejudices that are both sexist and discriminatory. Beyond the existing legal and institutional framework, I use role-playing games, archetype construction and examples of success stories to demonstrate the positive impacts of an integrated gender approach. I was able to develop close and trusting relationships with people who, at first contact, were resistant. In fact, the deep roots of certain religious and cultural beliefs constitute a major obstacle. The gender approach can be seen as a result of the imposition of Western values and the vision of development from North to South.

The change in perception and behaviour arises mainly thanks to the interpersonal communications that I establish once the skill building sessions are over. This strategy has thus far made it possible, for example, to organise discussion panels with partners (ministries and civil society organisations) on various themes related to human rights, women's

rights, the education of girls or the empowerment of women. The fact that I am a man particularly allows me to have more open and safe conversations with other men than my female colleagues could have, especially if they come from the North. I am aware of the disruptions that the gender approach can cause. There are, however, undeniable results and observable changes. This impact is achieved particularly thanks to the support of community influencers and focus on gender with partners. As "icing on the cake", I had male attendees who committed, on the spot, to being ambassadors for a more equal world.'

For the CLÉ Program, recruiting volunteers from the South began in response to a need, but will continue from a decolonial perspective on volunteer cooperation. It is very clear that volunteers from the South, in combination with other identities, are real agents of social innovation, transforming frameworks of reflection and facilitating a change of positions, to contribute to the achievement of capacity building outcomes.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cadesky and al: [The gendered experiences of local volunteers in conflicts and emergencies \(2019\)](#)

Comité Français pour la solidarité internationale : [Coopérer sur des enjeux partagés : une alternative à l'aide ? \(2016\)](#)

Coordination SUD (France): [Les ONG et leurs pratiques de partenariats nouvelles tendances et nouveaux défis \(2017\)](#)

Leroux, Marie-Pierre : [Le partage de connaissances en développement international : influence des processus relationnels sur les résultats et incidences sur le renforcement des capacités \(UdeM, 2015\)](#)

Lord, Catherine : [Le transfert de connaissances comme vecteur d'innovation sociale Vol.8](#)

Navarro-Flores, Olga : [Les relations de partenariat Nord-Sud : du paradoxe au compromis Une approche institutionnaliste des relations entre ONG dans le secteur de la coopération internationale \(CRSDD UQAM, 2007\)](#)

Sánchez-García, Julia: [The Influence of Gender Equality on Volunteering Among European Senior Citizens \(2022\)](#)

Tiessen, Lao, Lough: [International Development Volunteering as Transformational Feminist Practice for Gender Equality \(2020\)](#)

UNESCO : [La coopération Sud-Sud et le triangulaire en action \(2018\)](#)

VNU : [Rapport sur la situation du volontariat dans le monde 2022. Construire des sociétés égalitaires et inclusives. Bonn \(2021\)](#)

Ingrid Adovi is the Gender Equality and Inclusion Advisor for the CLÉ Program in Benin

Olga Houde is the Gender Equality and Inclusion Advisor for the CLÉ Program at the Paul Gérin-Lajoie Foundation