



Global Review on Volunteering Report

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 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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Global Review on Volunteering Report

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest volunteer-based humanitarian network. Together with our 189 member National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide, we reach 97 million people annually through long-term services and development programmes as well as 85 million people through disaster response and early recovery programmes. We act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so with impartiality as to nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class and political opinions.

Guided by *Strategy 2020* – our collective plan of action to tackle the major humanitarian and development challenges of this decade – we are committed to 'saving lives and changing minds'.

Our strength lies in our volunteer network, our community-based expertise and our independence and neutrality. We work to improve humanitarian standards, as partners in development and in response to disasters. We persuade decision-makers to act at all times in the interests of vulnerable people. The result: we enable healthy and safe communities, reduce vulnerabilities, strengthen resilience and foster a culture of peace around the world.

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Foreword

Volunteers are at the heart of the Red Cross Red Crescent and have been since we were founded more than 150 years ago. As many as 17 million volunteers participate each year across 189 countries. They work tirelessly to ensure that the most vulnerable people in communities have access to services and support. They are often the first on the scene when a disaster hits, providing immediate relief. They conduct health campaigns, operate ambulances, hospitals and first aid settings, they develop digital approaches to development work, educate children, provide comfort and care to refugees, work to alleviate social isolation in cities around the world and they return with care and compassion deceased bodies to family members in conflict areas. The sheer scale and scope of what they undertake and achieve each day across the world is astonishing.

Volunteers however do more than deliver services, they help strengthen community resilience, they develop social cohesion, they engage in civic processes and they advocate fiercely on behalf of vulnerable people. For the Red Cross and Red Crescent they ensure that we as an organisation remain rooted in the communities we serve, that we are informed, guided and governed by them.

This year the world's governments agreed on a common vision for the world's poor: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Perhaps more than ever before there has been a strong emphasis on the need to localize resources, expertise and authority. This is a welcome focus, and one in which community volunteers will play a critical role. Volunteerism, if appropriately supported, can ensure that development agendas are owned at the local level, that they are developed appropriately in line with cultural and social contexts, and that initiatives reach those who are living in the hardest to reach areas. It is hard to imagine any of the SDGs being fully achieved without the support of many millions of volunteers.

Our Global Review on Volunteering report shows the environments and contexts within which volunteering is practised are rapidly changing and how these changes are impacting volunteerism. If volunteerism is to continue to be the powerful development force that it is, if it is to continue to grow and to drive change in communities around the world and to provide an avenue for people to have a voice and active role in development processes, then it will need resourcing, research and a strong policy framework. Volunteers will need to be genuine partners in our efforts with an equal voice, and as drivers of change for vulnerable people rather than deliverers of services.

It is our hope that this report contributes to this debate and helps to inspire further dialogue, reflection and ultimately the development of policy and

practice. As the world's largest humanitarian volunteer organization we will work with stakeholders at all levels to promote volunteering and to support enabling environments where volunteering can thrive. Simply put: no other actors understand the needs of their communities, or the solutions to those challenges, better.



Tadateru Konoé

President

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Acknowledgements

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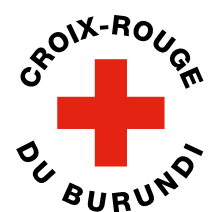
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Major Supporters



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Other Supporters

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Benin Red Cross, Colombian Red Cross, Djibouti Red Cross, Guinea Red Cross, Italian Red Cross, Macedonian Red Cross, Mexican Red Cross, Sierra Leone Red Cross, Senegalese Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross, Tanzanian Red Cross, Togo Red Cross, Tunisian Red Crescent, United Arab Emirates Red Crescent.

The researchers would particularly like to thank all the volunteers, staff and National Societies who participated in this study for their openness, expertise and generosity and for the work they do each day supporting communities.

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Executive Summary

Volunteers are critical to the reduction of suffering and the improvement of life for vulnerable people. In Syria, volunteers for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent have formed the basis for the majority of aid distribution in besieged cities and for people displaced by war. In western Africa, local volunteers have risked their lives to care for people stricken with Ebola virus disease, or to bury the dead, only to face stigmatization in their communities. Along the Mediterranean coast, volunteers have saved lives by helping people to shore, performing first aid, bringing blankets and warm food. In Mongolia volunteers help young people develop livelihoods. In Burundi 1 in every 22 people is a Red Cross volunteer working collaboratively with their communities to address development challenges.

Volunteering plays a critical role during emergencies as well as contributing to the development of long-term, sustainable solutions to some of the world's most intractable social and economic challenges. It is an increasingly significant feature of social and development policies as governments, civil society, local communities and individual people look for ways to improve education, health and reduce poverty.

But volunteering is neither a panacea nor a simple proposition. The contributions that volunteering makes needs to be situated in the context of complex and interdependent social, political, economic and cultural forces that are going through dramatic changes and are constantly reshaping who volunteers, why they volunteer, how they are able to engage and what they are able to accomplish.

This Global Review of Volunteering draws on the voices and perspectives of almost 600 volunteer managers, delegates and volunteers from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as external experts in 158 countries, to explore the challenges of promoting and supporting volunteering in the context of significant local and global change:

- recent economic crises and austerity in the global South and North
- changes to the communities in which volunteers work and from which volunteers are drawn, shaped particularly by increasing movements of people
- the emphases on cost-effective service delivery and associated reporting and accountability requirements in aid spending
- recent and often sustained conflict and violence in the global South

The Review identifies the challenges these changes present, how they overlap, and how they are changing and transforming what is meant by volunteering. It also highlights how they require volunteer managers and facilitators to negotiate increasingly complex and sometime dangerous settings with limited resources and high expectations.

By prioritising the voices of volunteer managers and volunteers, the Global Review offers insights, perspectives and analysis directly from the field. It challenges some of the prevailing assumptions that are limiting or stifling volunteering's potential to contribute to long-term, sustainable change, identifying research gaps alongside the knowledge and innovation of practitioners. Just as there is increasing global recognition and support for volunteering, particularly as part of achieving humanitarian and development goals, there needs to be a corresponding investment in time, resources and intellectual rigor in determining how best to promote and support this valuable human activity and those who enable it.

The Review makes an urgent call for greater debate, research and analysis on the ways volunteering is changing and being challenged. There is a particular need for more nuanced research and knowledge development in partnership with volunteer engaging organisations across the global South. Without such a process of learning, volunteering's universality risks being a smokescreen for ethnocentrism and unequal power relations, rather than something whose diversity can ensure a balance between a strategic global agenda, opportunities for global learning, and local ownership and effectiveness.

The findings of the Review have important implications for the agendas of volunteer-using organisations and their support and funding of volunteering, for researchers and their framing of research priorities, for volunteer managers seeking to develop innovative solutions to pressing problems and for donors in the development and humanitarian sectors.

The Review highlights four thematic priorities for policy debate, research and action at global, national and local levels. These form the basis of the four key chapters of this Review:

Volunteering cultures: between the universal and particular

Managing the universal and the particular is more complex than has been acknowledged and debated. It is not enough to think about volunteering 'cultures' without recognising how these include ways of organising, managing, resourcing and understanding volunteering. To date, the dominant 'culture' of volunteering has been largely assumed or taken as a given, despite being rooted in the histories and traditions of Europe and North America.

There is a need to for greater recognition of diverse volunteering 'cultures' and how they come together. This report calls for the development of approaches to volunteering forged through an openness to transforming what volunteering means at all levels. This will demand bravery on the part of global organisations whose conceptions of volunteering may be firmly embedded and easy to manage and audit. But it will also have its rewards, leading to more nuanced approaches to volunteering and improved, long-term effectiveness for volunteer-using organizations.

Volunteering and changing communities

Changes to the communities that Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers serve and from which its volunteers are drawn, provide a key challenge for volunteer managers and facilitators. Data from the review particularly highlight the significance of mobility and migration, urbanisation and urban slums, ageing and shifting demographics, and technology. These changes are bringing different ideas of volunteering together and challenging established volunteering 'norms'. Mobility, particularly in the context of urbanisation, is changing the traditional ways in which the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has mobilised and understood volunteers. As communities become more fluid and overlapping, and as individuals struggle to seek employment often remotely from their families, who volunteers and how they do it is changing. There is a need to go beyond adaptation and 'better' communication, and to be ready to reflect on and change the ways volunteering is practiced in and between these shifting contexts.

While there are examples of innovation in engaging and bringing together volunteers across divides, we know very little about the ways these particular challenges are changing volunteering. It may be attractive to identify volunteering as a means to deal with global change and challenges, but we need to understand and recognise how volunteering is situated within those changes, and that we cannot abstract it from the inequalities and injustices that it can help ameliorate.

Volunteering economies

How volunteering is remunerated and rewarded is a critical feature of the changing meanings and practices of volunteering. But this issue needs to be approached with care. Mainstream definitions of volunteering often require that pecuniary motivation is not the main driver, and there is growing critical commentary on the pitfalls of 'paid' volunteering (e.g. Wilson 2007, Lewis 2014 p. 38). But remuneration of volunteering is more complex than headlines sometimes allow, and needs to be explored in its specific contexts. There is slippage between the languages used to convey forms of 'payment' and recompense, and this can relate to strategic namings of work, including acting as a smokescreen for exploiting cheap labour. Aid project funding has taken particular advantage of volunteer labour, but in doing so, can undermine sustained volunteering at community level.

Looking beyond remuneration in the context of individual projects and in terms of issues of retention shows how differential levels of reward between organisations and projects is creating hierarchical volunteering economies. Remuneration shapes who is able to volunteer, intersecting with existing inequalities and potentially excluding the poor and the less socially and geographically mobile. Caution is needed around the ways remuneration features in policy development and debate, and there is a need for greater understanding of the complex and specific ways it shapes volunteering activity.

Volunteers in conflict and crises

Research and policy debate on volunteering has failed to engage with the experiences of local volunteers in conflict and crises. Despite increasing attention to

the roles of local actors in conflict and humanitarian crises settings, we have little understanding of the complex motivations and needs of such volunteers, nor how they can be supported. But such volunteers also face unique challenges, and have motivations and experiences that need to be brought into debates around the meanings of volunteering, about who volunteers and how, and in what ways they can be better supported.

Local volunteers can play critically important roles in settings where international humanitarian actors may have withdrawn or reduced their activity, and where there is significant societal disruption and destruction of local infrastructures. Their knowledge can also help humanitarian responses adapt to the specifics and dynamics of local settings. But data shows that local volunteers in these contexts are under-valued and receive inadequate support and protection during and after their time volunteering. Evidence also suggests they play a limited role in decision-making, despite their importance to humanitarian efforts. There is an urgent need for the profile of local volunteers to be raised within conflict settings as well as at global level, accompanied by better resourcing and appropriate safety and security.

The Review makes recommendations in four key areas:

Research and knowledge

Further research is urgently needed on the relationships between volunteering and development in global South settings. Research is particularly needed on the ways ideas of volunteering are being transformed and reinvented in the context of migration, urbanisation and aid funded volunteer remuneration. Such work needs to take seriously the voices of volunteers and volunteer managers, and to develop through co-productive partnerships with volunteer engaging organisations at local and global scale, academic institutions and wider development actors.

Policy, organizational and donor attention

Despite the significance of local volunteerism in developing countries to global development and humanitarian agendas, scant policy, legislative and donor attention is afforded to the needs of these volunteers. Investments need to be made into building enabling environments for volunteering to flourish and to address barriers to further and deepened engagement. This can include a greater focus on legislation that can either help or hinder people's participation in volunteering, as well as recognition and support for the many millions of existing volunteers, founded on a sound understanding of how these local cultures of volunteering manifest and contribute. Greater portions of budgets at both global and national levels need to be applied to strategies that promote sustainable local volunteer engagement and a meaningful voice and integration into the localisation of SDG priorities and work.

Local volunteers in conflict and crises

There is an urgent need to better understand and support the activities of local volunteers in conflict and crisis settings. Along with research on their roles and experiences, there is a need



for local and global advocacy, which increases recognition of their work, helping to mobilise resources to ensure their safety, security and well-being during and after their time volunteering. This can include greater access to training, equipment, intensive management support, psychological care and promotion of the role of humanitarian volunteers within the communities they serve.

Volunteer remuneration

There is a need for urgent debate, informed by further research, on the ways different forms of remuneration of volunteering are shaping volunteering activity. Rather than call for harmonisation or legislation, we suggest a first step is an open debate involving volunteering-engaging organisations, aid and donor actors, governments and volunteer managers to explore impacts, and identify strategies to ameliorate its negative impacts. Ultimately this must lead to local and international volunteer involving organisations reflecting on and improving their practice with regards to how they approach volunteer remuneration in development and humanitarian contexts.

These key areas of action could greatly enhance the ability of volunteers to have both an immediate and lasting impact. The UN Sustainable Development Goals provide an immediate context within which to consider the potential roles of volunteers in supporting sustainable social change in global South and North. The Review identifies three factors that will be critical to this:

Scale: Volunteering offers opportunities of scale in achieving the SDGs. But engagement of volunteers is not the same as mobilising new volunteers – there are already large numbers of volunteers working to support communities in innovative and different ways. Attention is needed to the ways engagement and mobilisation around the SDGs respects diverse meanings and existing practices of volunteering.

Localisation: Volunteering provides significant opportunities for community decision-making and the ownership of development agendas, in line with SDG commitments. But such promise will be undermined by the treatment of volunteers as a form of cheap service delivery, or the use of ideas of volunteering that are top-down and divorced from the specific contexts in which it is taking place.

Cost: Volunteering can be seen as cost-efficient if we consider the full range of benefits that it can offer. But it is not free, and can be undermined if treated as a source of cheap labour. Urgent attention is needed to the ways volunteering is rewarded and recognised, and efforts are made to ensure volunteers are supported with appropriate training, equipment and safety and security.

Without paying critical attention to the ways volunteering is being brought into the humanitarian and development spheres, and ensuring that policy and practice that reflects the changing realities and inequalities of the diverse settings in which volunteering takes places, volunteering is unlikely to offer anything new and more likely to be mainstreamed and absorbed in ways that diminish the distinctive contributions it could make.



About this report

To best understand the universal and the very particular dynamics affecting volunteering today, this report relies mainly on the voices of individuals with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement dealing with these changes at national and local level. Their experiences, rather than the prescriptions and ideas of academics and policy makers, form the backbone of this report. This is not to deny wider debates or research, but shifts the emphasis on to actors who are often not heard but who are at the forefront of defining volunteering in a changing, unequal and often fragile world.

This is particularly important as volunteering has become a critical feature of social policy and development discourse, based on what volunteers can deliver to communities and the larger society through their various activities, and via the very act of participating as a volunteer. The promise of supporting marginalised communities while also enhancing individual skills, social participation and community cohesion, have, unsurprisingly, made volunteering a very attractive tool for governments, civil society actors and corporations. But, as our data show, more than 90 per cent of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies interviewed in developing countries felt that investment in volunteering development is far too low and that they are unable to secure the resources to meet the rising challenges they face. This research then explores volunteering in the context of significant change, the mainstreaming of volunteering in social development policy, and the challenge of ensuring it is resourced and facilitated to benefit individuals and communities in ways that are sustainable and equitable, as well as culturally and social appropriate.

This research was conducted in order help inform new and strategic thinking within the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and to contribute to wider thinking on volunteering and its future in a changing world. The research particularly aimed to explore volunteering in the context of multiple and increasingly interlinked local and global changes and the ways these are shaping how economies are structured, aid and development approaches are managed and communities are formed and change. These interests reflect Red Cross and Red Crescent programming challenges, wider debates in social and development policy and research, as well as emergent themes in volunteering research. They also build on preliminary and anecdotal evidence from within the Red Cross and Red Crescent network, as gathered through the day-to-day interactions, gatherings and discussions between diverse National Societies facing both contrasting and complementary challenges. Reflecting this, the research explicitly worked across established global South and North boundaries, recognising that such boundaries have always been problematic and artificial (Humble and Smith 2007), and that they are being further eroded by changing patterns of economic development and aid and development activity (e.g. Mawdsley 2012).



Data for the Global Review were collected over two years in 158 countries. More than 250 people were interviewed in a combination of skype or face-to-face interviews. Skype interviews were typically conducted with people from National Societies who were responsible for national-level development of volunteering within their National Societies and had been with the organisation for more than 2 years and in many cases had occupied many roles within the organisation including as a volunteer. A small number (38) interviews were also conducted with both internal and external experts in volunteering, including organisational development professionals, leaders and technical experts from other volunteer-involving organisations, policy makers and academia. The interviews were conducted by internal researchers from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Most interviews lasted approximately one hour

and were recorded, transcribed and coded into categories of responses that were defined by the core research team. In addition, a qualitative survey was undertaken, with 340 volunteers across nine countries from each of the regions (as identified by the IFRC: Americas, Africa, Middle East North Africa, Europe and Central Asia, Asia-Pacific). Responses were then analysed by IFRC researchers under the guidance of Professor Matt Baillie Smith from Northumbria University, UK.

In addition, eight in-depth case studies were undertaken across all of these regions. These involved one- to two-week site visits by one or two researchers. Face-to-face interviews were then conducted with volunteers, leaders, staff and at times external organisations, government and policy makers. The case studies sought to explore at a deeper level some of the key issues emerging through the study.

The research team comprised mostly internal researchers which was a deliberate attempt to ensure a participatory and co-productive approach with those for whom these issues most impact their professional work, and to support the development of capacity in research methodology. All researchers in addition to having a practical background in volunteering had had some experience with research methodologies.

The researchers were supported by an advisory team that comprised a selection of academics, research and volunteer experts who guided the methodology and analysis.

In an effort to showcase the voices of volunteers and those that support them we have relied extensively on quoting them throughout this report. These quotes are generally represented verbatim to ensure sincere representation of their voice. The interviews were conducted under the promise of anonymity, therefore in almost all cases the quote is attributed by noting the interviewee's role and the region that their National Society sits within. In a small number of cases where it was important to understand the exact country the quote is referring to, we have noted that country and permission was sought for this from the interviewee.

While this report summarizes and explores key themes and issues raised by interviewees, it by no means reflects all of the debates or questions the research has raised. It is particularly focused on volunteering in the global South, and in the context of aid and development, reflecting a desire to address the current relative lack of scholarship on local volunteering outside the global North. We have identified themes that were seen as the most challenging by our respondents, and which cut across the data. We have also identified themes that illustrate the connections between volunteering and key contemporary socio-economic change, as well as the challenges these changes present. Finally, we have also sought to highlight findings in areas that remain relatively weakly understood or researched, notably volunteering in conflict settings. However, it is important to acknowledge the authors' positions in developing the analysis and themes. Shaun Hazeldine is a senior advisor for volunteering development with the IFRC, with a particular focus on supporting the strengthening of local volunteer ecosystems and organisational practices and approaches to volunteering. This includes developing policy, relationships and strategies for learning and knowledge-sharing, as well as promoting global engagement with volunteering for development. Matt Baillie Smith, is a professor of international development specialising in research on volunteering, development, civil society and citizenship, and

1 <http://www.ifrc.org/en/what-we-do/volunteers/global-review-on-volunteering/>

was previously an NGO practitioner. This report then reflects both the voices of those interviewed, as well as the particular policy and practice interests of the authors and their analysis of current research gaps.

It is hoped that this report will stimulate debate among volunteer-using organisations, development actors, governments, corporations and others connected with shaping the environments in which people volunteer. It offers a broad overview of the research, flagging key themes for much-needed debate. Further outputs from the data will explore some of the key themes in more detail with full reference to wider academic and theoretical literatures. These will be released in 2016. For the sake of readability and accessibility, and also given the breadth of this report, we have sought to reference sparingly. Furthermore, there already exist reports and other documents providing overviews of the volunteering literatures which we do not wish to repeat (UNV 2011; UNV 2015). The findings of the Global Review will also be shared through presentations, webinars, conference papers and social media, in order to foster debate within and beyond the Red Cross and Red Crescent network, and also to further deepen understanding of some of the themes and issues raised. These outputs will be shared via the Global Review website¹ and updated as they are developed.

The report has four main chapters:

Chapter 1, *Volunteering cultures: between the universal and the particular*, explores the challenges of understanding and managing volunteering at local and global scale, arguing that we need to pay attention to the ways particular 'cultures' of volunteering shape existing policy and practice. While there is increasing global recognition and support for volunteering, particularly as part of achieving humanitarian and development goals, there is a tendency to assume that definitions and norms developed in the global North are universally applicable and relevant. More attention needs to be paid therefore to different cultural meanings and histories concerning volunteering across the globe, to the very particular ways volunteering is expressed in diverse cultures and communities, and how these different approaches come together.

Chapter 2, *Volunteering and changing communities* analyses the challenges presented by significant socio-cultural and economic change and how this is shaping the communities from which volunteers are drawn and in which they volunteer. In doing so, it illustrates the importance of situating understandings of volunteering in the context of multiple and interdependent processes of change, further confirming the importance of paying attention to the ways understandings of volunteering change, move, and are produced through diverse interactions, including within and between organisations.

Chapter 3, *Volunteering economies*, explores the issue of remuneration and incentives, and their relationship to aid and development spending. It argues that global norms around 'payment' do not necessarily capture the complexity of how volunteer remuneration shapes who volunteers and how. The chapter highlights the ways aid and development spending are shaping patterns of remuneration, creating volunteering hierarchies that have wider implications for sustainable local volunteering activity.

Chapter 4, *Volunteering in conflict and crises* explores the experiences of supporting volunteers in conflict and crises, settings in which there are increasing numbers of volunteers in the global South. It argues that volunteers

are increasingly significant in the context of the withdrawal of international humanitarian actors and destruction of local infrastructures. It also confirms the need for far more support for these volunteers as well as further research to understand their needs and experiences.

The report concludes with recommendations, and reflections on the implications of the findings for the Sustainable Development Goals



Chapter 1

Volunteering cultures: between the universal and the particular

This chapter explores the challenges of understanding and managing volunteering at local and global scale, arguing that we need to pay attention to the ways particular ‘cultures’ of volunteering shape existing policy and practice. “It also raises questions about whether definitions of volunteering assumed to be universal should be imposed in all contexts and it calls for greater openness to models of volunteering based on the particularities of diverse cultures and situations.”

For the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, volunteering began at the conception of the organisation, in 1859, when the organisation’s founder, Henry Dunant, rallied local villagers to attend to the wounded on the battlefield of Solferino. The volunteers did what they could to help the wounded soldiers, regardless of which side they were fighting for. This event is often referred to as the birth of modern humanitarianism. More than 150 years later, voluntary service² remains at the core of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and it is one of the seven Fundamental Principles, officially adopted by the organisation in 1965. Today, up to 17 million local volunteers are engaged in Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies in 189 countries.

An idea of volunteerism pervades strongly throughout the organisation; many who participated in this research identified volunteerism as ‘central’ to the Movement. It is often described as the ‘backbone’ of the Movement, and many expressed sentiments such as ‘we could not exist without volunteers’. The IFRC’s Strategy 2020³ identifies volunteering as being ‘at the heart of community building’ and that it ‘contributes to sustainable human development’. It also acknowledges that a National Society’s capacity and effectiveness is directly related to its ability to mobilise, manage and empower volunteers from across the communities that it serves.

The definition of a volunteer in the Movement is articulated in the IFRC Volunteer Policy (2011): “A Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer is a person who carries out volunteering activities with a National Society, occasionally or regularly. It is carried out by people motivated by free will, and not by a desire for material or financial gain, or by external social, economic or political pressure.”

² It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain. - See more at: <http://www.ifrc.org/who-we-are/vision-and-mission/the-seven-fundamental-principles/#sthash.5Ncf34ln.dpuf>

³ Strategy which guides the 189 members of the IFRC

The definition is virtually the same as those expressed by many other volunteer- involving organisations including United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

The IFRC Volunteer Policy (2011) also stipulates that volunteers should be more than just ‘deliverers of services’, that they should be involved in decision making and in the design and development of programs in which they are involved. Volunteers are also encouraged to become members of the organisation and to play a role in governing their National Society, or even the wider International Federation, through participation on boards and other governance committees.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent commitment to volunteering, however, extends beyond just internal organisational rationale and functions. “National Societies also work with governments, the corporate sector and other partners to promote an enabling environment for volunteering in national life,” according to the policy. It is in this spirit that this report is published; it is not just about the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, but about volunteering more broadly, the trends and challenges affecting volunteer-based organizations, as well as the IFRC’s role in fostering volunteerism locally and globally.

Inspired by our findings, we also hope this report will contribute to re-shaping the way people involved in global and local volunteer policy think and talk about volunteering. As volunteering has become increasingly recognised as an important global force for community development, humanitarian relief and even the attainment of global social and economic targets, there has been a tendency to think of volunteering too monolithically, or as having certain universal norms.

In fact, there is often a very tangible tension between the universal and the particular in a global organisation that is also present and working at national and local levels. Global concepts of formal volunteering (conducted within an organisation or other formal setting) interact with local notions of formal and informal volunteering (practiced independently from organisations as an expression of community, cultural participation or social or humanitarian conscience). While global conceptions can help standardise and simplify mechanisms for promoting and managing volunteering, doing so in the name of its ‘universality’ risks obscuring and riding rough-shod over the diverse ways volunteering is practiced and experienced. In each context, volunteering is shaped by very particular social, cultural, political, economic and religious and other factors. As volunteering is increasingly promoted and celebrated as a feature of achieving macro development goals (UNV 2015), the tension between the universal and particular is becoming more acute.

The drive for a global terminology and conception of volunteering around the globe has in part been driven by a desire to promote consistency, enhance project delivery, ensure that volunteers within the organisation can receive high levels of support and training and that so-called ‘best practices’ are employed. This are certainly important element of organisational capacity to ensure volunteer effectiveness and retention, and in delivering programs within vulnerable communities. But as we shall see in the Chapter Four, it can be argued that some of this standardisation has been driven by a need, particularly in developing countries, to manage large volumes of foreign donor projects. This, in turn, requires an approach to volunteering that enables the expedient delivery of high-output projects. Such standardisation is also part of the demands of monitoring and evaluation, as required by principles of accountability to both

beneficiaries and donors. However, it is worth acknowledging that universal languages used to describe volunteering are part of the strategic policy-making repertoires of actors with diverse agendas and interests in volunteering, and as such, may bear little relation to the realities of volunteering as experienced on the ground. As Mosse argues, control over the interpretation of events – or in our case, a particular practice – is a critical feature of how control is exerted in development (Mosse 2005 p. 8). This then focuses attention on how particular ideas of volunteering are operationalized and by whom.

This study found numerous examples where global conceptions of volunteering were at best conflicting with local traditional understandings and at worst undermining them. If local volunteerism is to continue to play a major role in engaging and mobilising communities within the SDGs – as well as in local community well-being and development agendas – greater care and attention is needed to the interactions and interconnections of different definitions of volunteering. We must also make a greater effort to see how these definitions can be brought together productively and effectively. In the context of the power inequalities between global actors and community organisations, we need to be vigilant in ensuring that the strategically seductive ‘global’ doesn’t obscure the more complex and diverse, local and particular.

Volunteering ‘cultures’

The Global Review on Volunteering reveals not only that the very term ‘volunteer’ cannot be taken for granted, but that it can even have negative connotations. Despite its centrality to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the term was reported by several National Societies as being unfamiliar, despite strong practices of volunteerism in the culture of the country. For example, the Icelandic Red Cross reported that the approach and terminologies around volunteering promoted by the Movement were not well recognised within the country.

“It is very often said in the newspapers that Iceland does just not have a big tradition of volunteering. But when you look into it, it’s not true because Icelanders actually do a lot of volunteering for different organisations without calling it voluntary work. This definition that the Red Cross has of voluntary work is something that the population might not have the same idea about.”

In indigenous communities in Australia – in which reciprocity to family and community has a strong cultural dimension (Kerr et al. 2001 p.8) – the term ‘volunteer’ is sometimes received negatively, carrying with it implications that there are obligations to the volunteer organisation that would take precedence over family or community commitments (Kerr et al. 2001 p.8; Jope 2008)⁴. When entering into a significant engagement with remote aboriginal communities, Australian Red Cross had to work with local communities to adapt the model, and concepts of volunteerism, so that it was framed in a way that made sense to aboriginal culture. It drew on those traditions rather than trying to replace them. The term ‘volunteerism’ for instance was replaced in some communities by ‘community helper’ and thus framed more in the sense of obligation to community rather than to an organisation.

Such diverse, local understandings of volunteerism raise key challenges for the concepts of volunteering deployed by the IFRC and National Societies and how they promote these notions of volunteering at the local level. Just over half of the National Societies participating in this study felt that there was a very

⁴ East Germany (now: Germany), Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (now: Czech Republic and Slovakia), Romania, Albania, and Yugoslavia (now: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia).

strong history and tradition of volunteering in their country. Several of the National Societies who reported that volunteering was an intrinsic part of their culture named a particular tradition of volunteering. These traditions included *Bayanihan* or *Alayon* in the Philippines, *Siasanana* in Madagascar, *ikibiri* in Burundi and *Al Huda* in Palestine.

“Unorganised volunteer work was done before the establishment of the Palestine Red Crescent Society. There is something named ‘Al Huda’, which means aid or cooperation and it’s still known today and practiced in Palestinian villages, camps and provinces. Our old ancestors urged us to volunteer and after the establishment of the Society such work was organised, attracting many people to implement programmes within the Palestinian community.” (Palestine Red Crescent)

In many communities globally, the term ‘volunteer’ institutionalises existing cultures of mutual self-help, with the community having to adapt to the volunteer organisation, rather than vice versa (Fowler and Wilkonson-Maposa 2013). It could be argued that the western model of volunteerism assumes or even projects a globally consistent type of personal or community bond and obligation. This means locally specific models of volunteering can either be ignored or not recognised, or they are required to adapt to an externally conceived model in order to work with global actors, or local actors that are funded by, or subscribe to, western constructions of volunteering.

“Swaziland is really leading in showing the volunteer spirit. We still have a culture of caring in Swaziland, particularly the culture is attached to the national culture where we have to pay allegiance to our local chiefs, as well as the king and the queen, in some activities, which the people can do without any problem. So the culture I think is very rich but it is not so much modelled into the Red Cross way of doing things.” (Baphalali Swaziland Red Cross Society)

In this example, volunteering is understood in the context of that particular culture’s demonstration of ‘caring’. But along with other data, it also reveals how there is a strong sense of a Red Cross and Red Crescent culture of volunteering, even if this hasn’t been explicitly defined and stated, let alone conceived in terms of a particular ‘culture’ or way of doing things. So as well as paying attention to ‘local’ cultures of volunteering, we need to recognise the wider volunteering ‘culture’ within the Movement. We can understand this culture, as made up of the diverse mechanisms, expectations, reporting requirements, ideals and meanings that shape how the IFRC and National Societies promote volunteering at the local level. Referring to this as a ‘cultures’ ensures we understand the Movement’s construction of what volunteering is and how it is promoted in the same way that we explore local actors’ approaches. In other words, we avoid seeing the Movement approaches as simply ‘managerial’ or technical and local ones in terms of ‘cultures’; both are shaped through particular histories and traditions that underpin certain organisational forms. This then provides a platform for exploring more equal interactions and dialogues.

The idea of cosmopolitanism is also useful in thinking about how different ‘cultures’ and sets of ideas come together and can provide a framework for thinking about how different volunteering cultures are brought together. The concept of cosmopolitanism is much debated amongst scholars (e.g. Pogge 2002, Vertovec and Cohen 2002, Delanty 2006) and is generally associated with ‘thinking and feeling beyond the nation’ and with a recognition of the equal value of all humans regardless of nationality. A number of dispositions, approaches and structures of governance can flow from this. There has been significant attention to

the ways global civil society actors can play a role in a more cosmopolitan forms of democracy that go beyond the nation state (e.g. Held 2006), and to the value and significance of being open to cultural ‘difference’ and contagion, whether through choice or necessitated by economic or other circumstances (e.g. Datta 2009, Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012).

Being cosmopolitan is not simply about accepting ‘difference’, but about mutual transformation of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ (Delanty 2006), which is part of developing a more cosmopolitan world order in which the rights and humanity of all are respected and protected. As part of this, encounters between different ‘cultures’ cannot only result in the change of one party. In the context of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, this relates to the degree to which it may be open to different approaches to volunteering, but in reality expects conformity to its dominant cultural definition. It raises the question as to whether it is also open, in the process of working between universal and particular definitions, to changing itself and the dominant ideas of volunteering it deploys. To what extent are different volunteering ‘cultures’ marginalised, while the Red Cross ‘culture’ (or other international organisation) of volunteering is implemented? How open is the organisation to these differences and to allowing these cultural changes to flow through and to cause change at many levels within the organisation.

Reporting across the 158 National Societies that participated in this study indicated a mixture of approaches. In some, the pre-existing volunteering ‘culture’ (the “rich, local traditions”) were having to adapt to what was seen as a Red Cross Red Crescent ‘culture’, while in others, there was evidence of more innovation and adaptation in tandem with other volunteering cultures. In Burundi, where most rural communities are organized around hills – referred to by the French word ‘collines’ – the Burundi Red Cross, has nurtured a network of strong and vibrant local volunteer units founded on local cultural norms.

“If we have been able to succeed with the colline units and the management of the volunteers, it is because we are based on our own culture, which favours solidarity and volunteering. In our ancestral tradition, there are practices that we call ‘ikibiri’. This signifies, for example, that if a hundred people are working in a field for the person who invited them, this person offers them a pitcher of beer. The Red Cross has just rekindled this flame, which had been lost with the decade of war. We showed the communities these examples of the old Burundi in order to rekindle this flame. They were set a challenge. Those who tried it liked it, and spoke to those around them, and it spread from one colline to the next.

“We have an enormous number of ancestral practices. For example: ‘the child is not only restricted to the family’. This means that a child belongs to the whole community; it is up to everyone to put them on the right track. These practices show that old Burundi had values. This is also a tool that we use in the field of child protection. A vulnerable child is everyone’s business, not just the family’s. We base ourselves on our culture, our proverbs, to initiate change.”

A number of National Societies, when reflecting on cultures of volunteering in their country, reported that the volunteer opportunities offered by the National Society allowed for these to continue. In Luxembourg, the Red Cross facilitated a continuation of social cohesion and neighbourly engagement.

“Luxembourg being a small country, people are quite close to their neighbours, at least in rural areas, and social engagement for social causes is very strong. This is one of the

reasons for the attraction of the Luxembourg Red Cross, not only for its principles and values but also for its social activities that are open to everyone.”

In this way, cohesion between local, national and broader volunteering ‘cultures’ strengthened the engagement of volunteers. How this happens is highly diverse, rooted in different histories and in countries’ political, cultural and social traditions. In many settings, faith was very significant, in line with wider research on the importance of faith to volunteering and civic histories and presents (Wuthnow 2004, Green, et al. 2010, UNV 2011, Baillie Smith et al. 2013) The Italian Red Cross in particular highlighted this connection.

“I would not talk about specific cultural influences but in a general sense of strong feelings of solidarity and selflessness that characterize our country. Without a doubt, the long religious tradition of the country has somehow influenced and contributed to these characteristics in the population.”

The Portuguese Red Cross also reported the influence of religion on cultural attitudes to volunteerism: *“There are some specific cultural influences. It is worth mentioning that the tradition of solidarity and charity is deeply rooted in the society in general. Throughout history, there is a big tradition of Church charitable activities as well. All of these create good ground for the Red Cross as well.”*

The Uganda Red Cross Society also identified the influence of faith as a strong cultural value: *“In church, people still encourage people to support each other. So when a priest talks about supporting each other, this ... can influence our work [and help us] to go ahead. So [it’s a] a positive influence.”*

While volunteering cultures may be shaped by particular traditions or institutions, they are not static. Indeed, it is important to recognise that volunteering cultures, whether they are based on the ‘norms’ of global actors or rooted in national histories and traditions, are constantly shifting, shaped by political, economic and social shifts at the local and global level. The Red Cross Society of China tied a high level of engagement in volunteering with their National Society to emerging commitments to public service, as well as to older traditions of altruism.

“Volunteerism and altruism has always been part of China’s traditional culture. Modern volunteering concepts are also well received by Chinese people. The public is more and more enthusiastic about participating in public services. Volunteer recruitment is not a big challenge for us. The challenge for us is to design more community-based services so that more volunteers can join.”

That volunteering cultures are not fixed or isolated, but are rather are fluid and relate to each other, highlights the need for greater attention to the different ways they come together. This process, whether through the practices of global organisations or due to greater mobility and linking between people and communities, is central to understanding what volunteering means in an increasingly global age. Without acknowledging and understanding it, there is a risk that the new global interest in volunteering will prioritise forms and understandings of volunteering that fit neat boxes, but don’t correspond to the changing realities on the ground.

Volunteering cultures and political change

Approximately 15 per cent of National Societies reported that their local culture of volunteering was particularly shaped by recent political history. Seventy-one per cent of these National Societies were representing former European socialist states, where at times the term ‘volunteer’ was appropriated by states as a label for enforced forms of participation, giving it very negative connotations and a meaning far removed from both global and community definitions. (Other National Societies cited a more contemporary political influence on volunteering).

“Under the name of ‘volunteerism’ social programmes used to be compulsory. Thus, organised activities had a bad reputation. Even in those times, people were willing to help, but they didn’t have a positive view on organised activities. We have to rebuild the confidence toward organised activities. Nevertheless, people have trust in the Red Cross; it is well-known and respected in the communities.”

Approximately one fifth of National Societies representing the former communist states of Eastern and Central Europe⁵ and the former Soviet Union⁶ explicitly reported that volunteerism has a negative perception amongst citizens due to coercive or compulsory volunteering during the socialist era. One third of those National Societies reported a low level of voluntary participation amongst older volunteers in particular.

These observations are backed up by prior research, which found a connection between the compulsory nature of ‘volunteering’ in the past and continued resistance to it today (see Snajdr 2012; GHK 2010; Anke et al 2010; Voicu and Voicu 2009; Kuti 2004).

As socialist-era Red Cross societies were also active volunteer organisations, it is possible that citizens do not differentiate between the historical National Society and the present National Society. However, there are also reasons to do with emerging access to new avenues of discursive and community action (e.g. free press, protest, public gatherings) that came with the end of communist rule (Snajdr 2012). These new, previously proscribed avenues have perhaps overtaken volunteering as the most accessible mode of civic engagement. Unemployment and faltering economies are also factors, though these reasons are not common only to former European socialist states. Consider this observation from one representative of a National Society in a former socialist country:

“What is interesting is that after the dictatorship [the] term volunteers was difficult to explain because of the heritage from the communist system where volunteering was something compulsory. Transition from that the understanding of volunteering to real understanding was lasting a long time ... Now it [the understanding of volunteering] is much better and people in general are starting to express their own will and do not see it anymore as something that is obligatory or compulsory.”

Another interviewee shared a similar observation:

“In my opinion, the main cultural influence is related to the communist period during which people had some kind of obligation to be members of social-care organisations or be involved in social-care activities. Due to that heritage, those who lived in that period are less willing to get actively engaged in social/humanitarian organisations and volunteering

⁵ East Germany (now: Germany), Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia (now: Czech Republic and Slovakia), Romania, Albania, and Yugoslavia (now: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Republic of Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia).

⁶ Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Tajikistan, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Latvia, and Estonia.

activities, while the new generations (those who were born in the 90s' and after) look at volunteering from a very different perspective. They are more willing to get actively engaged in social or humanitarian organisations as volunteers. They are more responsible for local communities. This change is still on-going."

Conversely, some National Societies in former socialist states reported that older volunteers have stayed with the organisation, largely due to a sense of long-time belonging and identity that volunteering continues to offer.

"We had many, or we still have many old volunteers. In previous times people used to be like they were born and they were Red Cross members, and they were volunteers for the rest of their lives."

Other National Societies felt that the image of volunteering was associated with being old or traditional and did not resonate with young people. As one respondent from Eastern Europe put it:

"The concept of volunteering is not particularly cool or modern amongst youth."

As well as offering specific evidence about the ways political history is shaping volunteering, these examples highlight the broader importance of historical context.

In these examples, we can see how the legacy of past constructions of volunteering are presenting contemporary challenges. We can also see that there are continuities through the experiences of individual volunteers. This illustrates the need to pay attention to the particular and the historical, and to the ways that numerous factors come together to shape what volunteering is in a particular country at a particular moment. This further illustrates the need for caution against broad generalisations of volunteering cultures – and particularly the application of those generalisations as a foundation for social and development work across varying contexts.

Conclusion: volunteering cultures and global volunteering 'norms'

The presence of different volunteering 'cultures' and the ways they come together, and change over time, complicate how we define volunteering beyond the local. This is particularly significant in the context of the growing global promotion of volunteering as a local activity that can support development goals. Most definitions of 'volunteering' appear neutral, couched as they are in formal organisational languages, often with reference to volunteering's universality. But such definitions are largely shaped by the ideas and experiences of organisations based in the global North, and by volunteering research which has largely been concentrated in Europe, North America and Australia. As Patel et al note, on their research in Southern Africa: 'There is a paucity of information, research and published works on service and volunteering the countries where the research was conducted' (2007 p.5) The standard 'northern' definition of volunteering typically tends to have three pillars:

That it is done under free will;

That it benefits the community in some way, beyond the volunteers familial circle and;

That it is not done primarily for material or financial gain

Definitions that contain elements of these three pillars abound in the literature (e.g. UNV 2011), but in our study it was abundantly clear that there were a variety of factors that were challenging these definitions and other norms of volunteering as accepted in most developed countries. By naming definitions that are rooted in the experiences of the global North as universal, particular forms of volunteering are privileged over others. This can also happen when such universal definitions purport to celebrate diverse volunteering cultures but do not in fact challenging established thinking or practices. Furthermore, by promoting and naming ‘universal’ definitions, global volunteering actors gain significant influence and authority. In these ways, particular volunteering cultures, and associated funding models, policy frameworks, community engagement approaches, management tools, advocacy and research, become entrenched as ‘universal’ volunteering norms. Just as engagement of grassroots actors has been used to legitimate development actors and activities – while the local actors remain marginalised in reality (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2011) – there is a risk that the diversity of volunteering is used to underpin its promotion at global scale, even as that promotion undermines diverse volunteering practices.

Just as the aid and development community has learnt that ideas cannot and should not transplant from the global to South, so the volunteering community needs to take this issue seriously. Doing so requires acknowledgement of different volunteering cultures and histories, and caution in celebrating particular iterations as universal. Volunteering is tied up with history, with identity, what has taken place already in a given context and with what’s currently swirling around in society. It is also not necessarily as formal as we’ve come to think about it. The great emphasis on volunteer management, technical support and related systems, is not the only way to think about volunteering, despite the ways the aid sector has demanded formalised approaches in line with funding and reporting norms. Such an approach is part of particular cultures of volunteering and development. Failing to recognise this will undermine local agency and capacity in the ways that aid and development strategies have frequently done. The managerialism and de-politicisation of development – the increasing focus on development as an administrative task to be managed rather than a issue of tackling unequal power relations, (Ferguson 1994, Quarles van Ufford et al. 2003) – may mean that forms of volunteering that do not confirm to associated systems of decision-making, accountability and reporting may be overlooked. Forms of volunteer management that arise from the prioritisation of the individual in global North settings, may fail to recognise or respect forms of volunteering that are organised collectively elsewhere. As well as paying attention to the intersection of the universal and the particular, in many countries we need to pay attention to the relationship between volunteering and development cultures. These processes of negotiation remain under-researched, meaning we lack sufficient understanding of what works and how, and we have limited conceptual understanding of the new types of volunteering being produced.

These are not just pedantic issues relating to terminology or phrasing; they impact the worldview of the communities we are working with. They also affect our notions of how development should be undertaken and how communities engage with each other, define themselves and manage power. It is critical to understand these communities and to be able to adapt if we hope to be successful at supporting their development aspirations. It is also critical to be cautious of global norms of volunteerism, particularly at the dawn of a global development agenda that strives perhaps more than ever for localisation.



Chapter 2

Volunteering and changing communities

This chapter analyses the challenges presented by significant social, cultural and economic change and how this is shaping the communities from which volunteers are drawn and in which they offer their service. In doing so, it illustrates the importance of seeing volunteering in the context of multiple and interdependent processes of change – including to our understandings of volunteering – that change, move, and are produced through diverse interactions, including within and between organizations.

“We have a lot of challenges. One of them is the rapid change of the world, the rapid change of everything. This is a big challenge, yeah? Everything is changing rapidly and what will be our tendency to respond for this change? We have change in communication, change in authority, change in people’s thinking. How we can cope with that change in time pressure? Now (the volunteer) has a lot to do with his time. He has television, he has more easy transportation so he can reach everyone that he wants. So he has shorter time than he had before, you see?”

This observation, from an interviewee who works for a National Society in western Africa expresses what many are feeling: the changes around us are all pervasive, affecting nearly every aspect of our lives. For some, there is also a sense of desperation and urgency, as expressed by an interviewee from a Middle East National Society,

“There is no solution in the short term. This is something that will affect the country for the next ten years. Immigration will worsen, the economic situation will worsen [and] the security situation is not very good. So the outlook for volunteering is not very good. This is why we urgently need to try and do what we can about it.”

The changes brought about by globalisation, contrasting and accelerating patterns of economic growth alongside persistent stagnation and austerity, the transformation of global communications and media, new forms of mobility and migration, changing forms of state and global governance, are profoundly changing volunteering. The rapid pace of change across these domains shapes not only the dynamics of the communities in which volunteers engage, but also who volunteers, how and why.

The impact of many of these changes have been well documented in countries in the global North (e.g. in the UK: Milligan and Fife 2005, Rochester et al.

2010), and this has often shaped the dominant debates in volunteering. Less has been written, however, about the experiences of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in developing countries, and for many of them, priorities may be different. For example, while many National Societies in developed and middle-income countries have moved to engaging corporate volunteering in the context of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (e.g. Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011, Samuel 2013), the experience was mixed in developing countries. Many National Societies reported that despite an emerging private sector, CSR in their countries was not well developed. For the majority of those that did have some engagement with corporations in developing countries, volunteering was only a very minor component of the partnerships or did not feature at all. There were many strong examples of partnerships between the private sector and National Societies in developing countries that were effectively addressing community needs. However, the volunteering component of these initiatives was often under-developed. While this does suggest room for development in coming years, it is also a clear indication that for a great many countries, engaging with corporate communities through volunteering is making a very minor contribution toward addressing humanitarian issues. For instance, it was common that corporate volunteers would participate in blood-donation drives. But they were less often a feature in longer-term development programming. This highlights the need for caution when celebrating the role of corporate volunteering in development. While volunteering in the global South has become a significant part of CSR strategies of global corporations – with a range of high profile corporate-civil society partnerships attracting attention – this sub-set of international volunteering can obscure the lack of CSR-led volunteering within global South settings, and by global South volunteers. This is despite the presence of global corporations in these countries and the growing strength of domestic corporations within some settings.

This is just one example of how an important change affecting volunteering in the North is playing out very differently elsewhere. Understanding the particular changes shaping volunteering in extremely diverse circumstances is therefore critical to shaping a relevant response to these dramatic and rapid changes. This chapter explores the changing communities in which volunteers are engaged by exploring the impacts of migration and mobility, urbanisation, an ageing population and the emergence of online communities. These are vast topics in themselves, and so here we prioritise the voices of respondents and their accounts of how these changes are affecting their work.

Migration and Mobility

Today, more people are on the move than at any other time in history, according to organizations that track migration patterns. Around the world, meanwhile, millions of people have recently settled into new homes and communities, creating new challenges and opportunities for those who propose voluntary service as a means to improve life and reduce suffering.

In some parts of the world, this is resulting in communities that are more diverse than ever before, with changing and contrasting degrees of harmony. It is worth noting also that migration is a global phenomenon. While much attention is paid to south-to-north migration, patterns of migration are unfolding at similar rates south-to-south, challenging public understanding and rendering this an issue that affects virtually every country.

Among National Societies that identified migration as an issue impacting volunteering, most could readily identify the challenges as well as benefits and opportunities presented by migration. Handy and Greenspan (2009) identify the social- and human-capital benefits that come from volunteering as playing a role in the integration of immigrant communities, a perspective shared by respondents in our research when discussing volunteering and migration. Volunteering was viewed as a strategy that could be used to help build cohesion and social inclusion, by providing an avenue for newly arrived groups to participate in society, develop new connections and encourage a sense of belonging. One interviewee from a West African National Society exemplified this approach:

“We have different cultures in our provinces and this actually allows us to develop cultural diversity, by bringing together our young volunteers, who come from all backgrounds. We are better for it. It’s an educational resource and a source of social gratification. We see it as a cohesive force, a way to achieve national solidarity because we value social cohesion, citizen proximity and national solidarity. Therefore, this cultural wealth is part of our model, it’s part of the diversity of our human resources. It’s a strength we have.”

Similarly, this interviewee from a South East Asian country said volunteering also helps give new residents and citizens an opportunity to build a sense of belonging in their adopted countries.

“In the last ten years, [our country has] admitted a lot of foreigners. We’ve given a lot of permanent residence and citizenship to people, especially from the Asian region. There are a lot of young people in university who have become volunteers so that they can help their adopted country and so that it can help engender a sense of belonging here.”

A small number of National Societies have capitalised on the global Red Cross and Red Crescent network to make the transitions smoother for migrants. One National Society in Central Asia, for instance, provides Russian-language training for people about to migrate to Russia and links them into Russian Red Cross branches in the towns to which they are migrating.

For some National Societies, patterns of international migration have meant that large numbers of people are moving away to seek employment or educational opportunities. This too creates challenges for volunteer engagement. The trend is exemplified by this Eastern European National Society.

“Today we are facing the situation that people are leaving the country, or they’re leaving their home region, and they are working in big cities ... It is a labour and migration issue that is very accurate today. And also the labour policy in the European Union, that there are no problems to work in Finland, in Germany, in UK, you could leave the country very easily and people are leaving their, their local, local villages, towns, to get better job positions.”

In some countries in the Middle East and North Africa, similar observations were made by volunteer managers.

“Young people here are moving through the borders to Saudi Arabia and the neighbouring countries looking [to make] their living.” (Middle Eastern NS)

“Migration, I think this is going to get worse. A lot of young people want to leave the country to work. It’s hard to live under these conditions right now. They have only tourism maybe, no other industry.” (North African NS)

In some regions, there are reports of particularly high numbers of young people on the move, as shown by this comment from a representative of an East African National Society.

“The a rate of unemployment in the country, especially with the youth, is very high. So sometimes they decide to go on what we call ‘an adventurous journey,’ going to maybe Arab countries, to Europe, whatever. So it’s just in search of maybe better living conditions or education, whatever.”

For some, particularly those from countries with smaller populations, this phenomenon has meant that there is a decrease in the presence of key potential volunteer groups. In many cases, such as with one Pacific Island National Society, it has also placed additional strain on the remaining volunteer pool.

“In the next ten years, migration [will continue to be] a big issue. We have volunteers who have multiple organisational responsibilities. They might be involved in church, sport, Red Cross and, I don’t know, the PTA, on the school committee, whatever. So because we have smaller numbers and our population is declining, we’ll find more and more volunteers have diverse responsibilities across the community. And it’s happening at the branches, that you have the mayor is also the power person or the water person. It’s a challenge today but I could see it becoming more and more of a problem in the future.”

National Societies typically attempt to ensure a national reach, maintaining a volunteer presence in most if not all areas of the country. But for some, the impacts of migration (and urbanisation) were so severe that rural centres are virtually abandoned particularly by young people, reducing the number but not necessarily the need for volunteers. This is not just an issue for developing countries. This interviewee is from a Western European National Society.

“A big topic is demographical change, the aging population. We have quite important ‘migration’ both within and outside, from the countryside to the cities. Especially in the eastern part we have villages that are basically empty. Just a few elderly stay there, and this is a big challenge, also in regard to guarantee the medical services for the people remaining there.”

While some National Societies are attempting to manage significant influxes in populations by broadening the diversity of their own workforces, others have found themselves trying to address the many social and health issues in their communities with a diminishing potential volunteer pool, particularly in rural or isolated areas.

Case study

A festival of food brings understanding

A youth volunteer project in Macedonia devised by the Macedonian Red Cross made small funds available to projects designed and driven by young people. One group of young people in a regional centre developed a project to promote understanding and cooperation between Albanian, Macedonian and Roma people. Joint activities were developed collaboratively between the groups including a food fair and festival. The project was evaluated to have not only contributed to an improved understanding between the communities but also was a catalyst for other subsequent collaborative ventures.

In addition to striving for national reach, National Societies also aim to ensure that the organisation has appropriate representation from all community components.

There is a well-established consensus in the literature and practise around development that the recipients of services should have meaningful representation within the organisation delivering that service (OECD 2006; OHCHR 2007; UNDP 2008). This consensus is variously affirmed as ‘nothing about us without us’ and there are calls for the post 2015 development agenda to ensure strong participation at all levels from rights holders.

In this spirit, the IFRC Volunteering Policy (2011) advises that “National Societies recognise the value of a diverse volunteer workforce, and actively recruit volunteers, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, disability or age.”

It goes on to say that National Societies should “remove physical, economic, social and cultural barriers to participation, and recruit volunteers based on their potential.”

But in some cases, this is easier said than done. For many, such as is noted by this Western European National Society in a country that is receiving a large number of migrants, the rapid changes in their communities have made the challenges enshrined in this policy increasingly difficult to meet:

“Unfortunately we cannot claim to be a National Society with volunteers who represent and reflect the cultural and social diversity of our country. Our country is becoming an increasingly multicultural and multi-ethnic country, but only a small percentage, for example, of non-citizens, are volunteers of the Red Cross ... Migration [is a trend that will impact volunteering]. Our Country is notoriously one of the major receiving countries of migrants.” (Staff member West European NS)

Another western European National Society conducted a study that showed that while 15 per cent of the country’s population was in some way related to migration, only two per cent of that group participated in Red Cross as volunteers. Similarly, for one volunteer leader from a Pacific Islands National Society, attaining a diverse volunteer core that matches the diversity of the population is particularly hard in the more populated areas.

“In the remote islands I guess there is representation from all sectors of the community: government, religious, traditional leaders and all of that. I think there’s a good composition from all, because they’re smaller numbers [of people there]. But for the mainland, it’s quite a challenge because we have migrant communities now as well, which are not necessarily represented ... Definitely with the ongoing activities that we have, I wouldn’t say there’s representation from the migrant community.”

The rapid changes and influxes brought about through increased global mobility present a particularly acute problem, given some groups’ transient presence within countries, as well as challenges over both their formal status and wider acceptance within countries. At the same time, such groups are also heterogeneous, with diverse faith, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as varied and often challenging individual needs. The consultation with and involvement of vulnerable groups within services has been identified as being of vital importance to meeting the Millennium Development Goals (UNDP and SNV 2009) and shaping the post-2015 agenda (UNDP 2013). As some National

Societies identified, they were often developing services that targeted newly arrived communities but at times experienced challenges engaging these communities as active participants. As one representative from a South American National Society explained:

“Today there is a big increase in immigration and I think that (our National Society) sees them more like beneficiaries of the actions rather than volunteers. But there are also people who come here and who offer themselves as volunteers, which is what’s happening today. I think this is something that could increase over time.”

A staff member from a Western European National Society expressed a similar concern:

“A lot of our programs are with migrants but I would say we haven’t been that successful in getting them to volunteer in those programs.”

While some National Societies are beginning to make preliminary changes to enable greater engagement with diversity (such as translating materials and undertaking targeted recruitment drives), others were implementing much greater organisational change such as amending communications and workplace materials, developing HR policies to be more sensitive to cultural differences, employing staff from diverse communities, developing organisation-wide policies and strategies, providing cross-cultural training for existing staff and establishing physical offices or centres within new or emerging communities. The majority of National Societies, however, admitted that they still had some distance to go.

In addition to migration for education or employment reasons there are also 60 million people globally who are displaced because of conflict and persecution (UNHCR 2015). Many of the people who have experienced the trauma of warfare or extreme violence, and were forced to flee their homes, have particular needs that some National Societies are struggling to meet (some of which will be explored in greater detail in the chapter on volunteering and conflict). For some National Societies, the arrival of significant numbers of people in already densely populated areas, has brought considerable struggles in their country. National Societies have had to not only scale up to provide support in refugee camps or host communities, but have also had to find new ways to address how these issues are changing urban centres that swell with newly arrived groups. For some National Societies already operating on strained resources, such as this one in the Middle East, this has proved a considerable challenge.

“We have so many here in refugee camps and our volunteers are working with them. But often local people will say, ‘Why are you volunteering to help them? We have our own problems, what are you doing about this?’”

Nonetheless, a number of these National Societies, particularly across the Middle East and Africa, have developed outstanding models at building engagement and volunteerism within these communities (See Case Study below).

The emergence of increasingly diverse – and sometime fragmented - communities produces diverse understandings and concepts of volunteerism that need to be engaged with at local level, as well as in terms of global and local actors. The challenges of dealing with changing forms of community can be particularly seen in the context of the impact of urbanisation on volunteering.

Case study

The Nyarugusu camp in Tanzania has a population of just over 68,000 refugees, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Burundi. Many have been residing there for many years. Within the camp, the Tanzania Red Cross Society has mobilised refugees as volunteers to work within the camp with their fellow refugees.

One such volunteer is Joel Kambale, who fled the DRC in 2006 because there was “too much fighting, too much killing.” After receiving assistance himself from the Red Cross while fleeing the conflict in his home country, Kambale became a Red Cross volunteer five years ago so he could give back.

“I have received some training from the Red Cross since arriving here at the camp,” says Kambale, a 42-year-old father of two who says he is too afraid to return to the DRC. He works with the Red Cross developing and delivering health campaigns and acting as a bridge between the health services and the community. He is just one of many hundreds of volunteers in the camp supporting the population.

Urbanisation and changing communities

“In a way here, we have two worlds and you see it when they come from the country where volunteering is a way of life. It’s not formal volunteering like we know it. It’s just a way of life. If the neighbour doesn’t have any food, you give them some. Or if the storms are coming, you help the elderly to organise their homes. It’s just the way our traditions are. But when [people] come into the city, they are looking for money, and the traditions just aren’t like they are back home. Everything changes and their relationship with helping others changes too. They are struggling to survive, they are needing money, they don’t have time, they don’t belong to communities in the same way. Now, they are connected in social media, they are looking for opportunities, they will participate, but it is for shorter times, and they want something. It changes.”

This comment, from a staff member in an east African National Society highlights how volunteering is changing in the context of increased urbanisation – both in the volunteers’ newfound communities and those they have left behind. These observations are particularly telling, given that most of the world’s population now lives in cities, and within the next 30-40 years that number will rise to 70 per cent (WHO 2010). Never before in history has the majority of the population lived in cities, and never before has such a large number of people migrated so quickly, with particular impacts on volunteering. The shift has been dramatic over the last 20 years across Latin America, the Caribbean, Europe, North America and in parts of Asia and Africa, as youth populations in particular have moved away from the rural areas and into cities in search of economic and other opportunities (UN DESA 2014). National Societies and other local volunteer-using organisations in developing countries are addressing a new set of complex factors that shape not only who volunteers and how, but also what kinds of needs communities have that volunteers can help address.

Far and away the greatest challenge noted by National Societies in urban settings has been in the retention of volunteers. Wider research, meanwhile, has revealed important differences between rural and urban settings in relation to this issue (Freeman et al. 2009). While retention has been observed by most National Societies as a general issue that has emerged in recent years, it was often identified as a particular feature of managing volunteers in urban settings. For National Societies in developed countries, this has been a feature of the landscape for some time. In some developing and middle-income countries, the volunteers are still staying on average from 2-4 years, which by many comparisons is still a long engagement. But most of these National Societies, like this Central European National Society, also report that volunteers tend to be engaged for shorter periods of time.

“Retention is the biggest problem, especially for these non-traditional volunteers, if I can call them this. In our case, it’s a continuous and constant task, and it should be part of our daily work to have volunteer management on all levels. This is still somehow, yeah, challenging for us. Actually with the recruitment, usually my colleagues would say, or when we have these common meetings, they complain that we need more volunteers, and it’s a problem to get volunteers. And actually ... practical experience doesn’t mirror that, because we get volunteers, it’s just a problem to keep them.”

In addition to a shorter overall length of engagement, many National Societies also noted shorter weekly or monthly engagement or an overall reduction in hours. One National Society in South East Asia noted that the average volunteer in their urban environments participated for 72 hours in a year down from 104 hours just a few years ago (IFRC 2014). There were considerable variations in this reporting but it is fair to say that the research reveals a general trend toward shorter engagement periods. It is important to note that drivers behind this trend are complex and varied, and whilst more episodic volunteering has been recognised in wider policy and research literatures (e.g. Cnaan and Handy 2005), this review reveals a need for caution in generalising about why this is the case, as we explore in Chapter 3. The question for National Societies, such as this one from the Caribbean, is how best to engage volunteers who have different expectations than those in the past.

“We have realized that in terms of a traditional volunteer, where you will have persons that will commit to volunteering with the Red Cross anytime the Red Cross needs them, you don’t have that so much now. What we tend to see more in terms of trends that are developing, is the short-term capability of volunteers or interestingly who just want to volunteer two hours or maybe for a week, and that’s pretty much it. We have a lot of short-term volunteers who want to do short-term projects, and not so much long-term projects, and that is what I think of in terms of the cultural integration of the whole region.”

The upshot of this trend for many National Societies has been that it has required increased investment to simply maintain volunteer levels and the training they require to undertake their roles. One National Society volunteer manager in North Africa cited continued challenges even after an increased investment.

“Well yes, we live in a changing world, and needs are changing...and we need to rethink volunteering. We need to find new ways to retain volunteers. People used to volunteer on average for at least three years, but we are seeing a decrease, even though we do a lot of training. We try to motivate our volunteers. We have made a big effort. We now train 15,000 volunteers a year instead of 10,000. But in spite of this, we can see that volunteering is decreasing.”

The relationship between social networks and trust differ in rural and urban models of social capital, with implications for pro-social behaviour, such as volunteering (Beaudoin and Thorson 2004). While this can have a negative influence on decisions to join volunteering in urban centres, in some National Societies volunteers and staff observed that in cities, volunteers may be more likely to seek volunteering opportunities as a way to build connections. This has been variously coined as ‘bridging social capital’ and appeared to be more of a feature in discussions about urban volunteering:

“When I moved to (the city), I didn’t know many people and so I started volunteering in part to just meet some new people.” (Volunteer, Asia Pacific)

“I decided to volunteer because someone asked me to and I needed to improve my interpersonal relationships and to meet different people... I’ve got friends here now I’ve known for half my life.” (Volunteer Central America)

The challenges National Societies face, and the opportunities these changes afford, are more than issues of management and administration, and go to the heart of what volunteering means to individuals and organisations. Central to these challenges are the ways communities are being reconfigured through urbanisation. Within urban centres, communities can be more fluid, heterogeneous and often possess complex associations that may exist independently of each other, creating overlapping and interweaving communities within urban settings.

The most important aspect of city communities is their sheer numbers: there can be hundreds, even thousands of co-existing communities, overlapping, interacting, and competing for influence and resources” (IFRC 2014) People may not always know their neighbours in cities but they will often be a part of multiple overlapping and independent local and remote communities, through work colleagues, longer-term friends and family, sports or other recreational groups, religious associations, online communities and ethnic communities. Traditional approaches to volunteering and community engagement that have been generally employed in rural areas, based on localised and less-complex concepts of community, are increasingly ineffective.

“(Our model of volunteer engagement) works really well in the villages, but we haven’t been able to make it work as well in the capital. We have had to consider different strategies, particularly to attract young people.” (Staff member, Central African NS).

In the context of complex power relationships, and the ways these play out between different communities, defining distinct community settings has become harder to do. This means that engaging with specific communities has become more challenging and requires a greater understanding of the complexity of the systems and relationships that define them.

The economic challenges facing potential volunteers in urban environments, particularly in developing countries, were also a major issue cited by interviewees as negatively impacting volunteering. The changing economies of volunteering will be explored in a later chapter, but for many, these challenges were inextricably linked with the dynamics of urban environments. People are migrating to enhance economic opportunities and are at times separated from the communal and subsistence support structures that protect them in rural communities. These issues have the impact of reducing time available for volunteering because people are more consumed with securing work opportunities

in often challenging and isolating circumstances, with significant pressure to return funds 'home':

"We have difficulty recruiting volunteers in urban centres. It is easier in rural areas. The voluntary activities consist mainly of working in the fields or in collection, to raise some money for the vulnerable. In the towns, a single job is not enough to support the family, so we have less time." (Volunteer Manager Central African NS)

"It's people movement from villages to towns and the economic situation. Most volunteers are students and are affected as well with difficult economic situations and do not have time for volunteerism." (Staff member East European National Society)

The notion of volunteering for some sort of economic or other reward is also different in urban settings, with volunteers activities more firmly located within a context of seeking salaried employment and where the everyday life of cities requires ready cash to ensure survival and mobility. These challenges are strengthened further when individuals are living in cities away from their 'home' and family. As a result of these pressures, many potential urban volunteers are seeking compensation or financial reward from volunteering with National Societies.

"Ninety-eight per cent of village volunteers join volunteering without requiring compensation. But in towns, you are going to see when the volunteers come they are going to ask for something. They are going to ask for transport and so on. Because for the most part, they are young people with qualifications and they need a bit of (support). So this is it, the lack of employment that [means] often the volunteers are looking for sources of revenue. But this is large cities. (West African National Society)

The issue of financial compensation for volunteering has become a major feature of many volunteering landscapes and is particularly predominant in urban centres. It is perhaps not surprising then that the one IFRC study identified that for urban volunteers, training opportunities were the most important factor in terms of retention of volunteers, as they faced particular pressures to enhance their employment opportunities (IFRC 2014).

Aside from time and economic pressures, many respondents identified a difference in the demographics of people who are able to engage in urban settings.

"When I look to (the capital), for example, it's very difficult to find adults volunteering themselves. What you find it's more youth. When we go to a rural area, we just find the women because men are out working in towns or in the mines in (other countries), things like that. So investing in youth [is where] I think we can do our best. It's not easy to ask people to give more when they are restricted in terms of capacity. So what we are trying to do is try to ensure that at least we can have a number of volunteers to help us to do the activities that are a benefit in the society. (Southern African NS)."

One volunteer leader in a South American National Society also noted that the majority of young people there move to the capital to further their education once they finish their secondary studies. The National Society's volunteer department in the capital city experiences a dramatic drop in the number of young people during the summer holidays when students go back to their places of origin. "This always results in an increase and then a decrease in the (volunteering)," the volunteer leader said.

For many National Societies in developing countries, their urban volunteer population is predominantly young. Despite the growing challenges with engaging

young people in these settings, particularly in terms of employment, it is not unusual in urban settings for National Societies to report that young people make up over 80 percent of their volunteer base. However, the challenges with engaging working-age populations in these settings, while often difficult in rural areas also, only seem to have intensified within these new urban realities. Many ‘middle-aged’ volunteers are consumed with other priorities and cannot afford as much time for volunteering.

The dilemma of attracting volunteers from multiple age groups is just one of the challenges National Societies face when it comes to developing a volunteer base that reflects the diversity of the neighbourhoods they serve. It is worth noting that for most National Societies, their capacity to engage with diverse communities in urban environments is a key challenge in the context of mobilising for large-scale development initiatives. This increased diversity in urban communities also brings much more diversity to the definitions and conceptions of volunteering and how these are manifested in both policy and practice. As one leader from a Central American National Society explained, it’s not always clear how to engage with certain ethnic groups.

“(This one particular ethnic group) does not really participate as volunteers, I guess they are not interested in our approaches, they don’t appear to want to volunteer with us.”

While this comment might lead to a conclusion about lack of participation, or even that the organisation is failing to adequately engage with a particular community, deeper questions need to be addressed. Rather than solely seeking a more effective way to communicate with new and diverse communities, National Societies are being forced to re-examine their approaches and be more open to diverse concepts and interpretations of volunteering. Some of the models of volunteering may have been built on the presumption of a cultural homogeneity that no longer dominates. In this, we can see a practical manifestation of the challenges of developing a more cosmopolitan and mutually transformative approach to volunteering that we outlined in the preceding chapter.

A major feature of urbanisation in developing and middle-income countries has been the emergence of urban slums. Already, approximately 1 billion people around the world are living in ‘urban slums’, a number that is, by some estimates predicted to reach 1.5 billion by 2020 (UN DESA 2014). These environments present many additional challenges and changes to volunteering. The sheer pace at which the slums have emerged has meant that public policy, infrastructure and voluntary organisations have at times lagged behind. In some ways, these environments demonstrate a more dramatic example of the issues outlined above. But they are also further complicated by much higher and more acute vulnerabilities, characterized by multiple intersecting points of disadvantage.

However, our experience with engaging with these communities in development initiatives have been mixed:

“The young people here they don’t have a lot of opportunities, so sometimes they fall in with gangs to try and make money, they are not so much interested in volunteering. They are interested in surviving.” (Youth leader, West African NS)

“It is not always easy to get volunteers from these communities, so we often end up sending volunteers in from other areas to work with them. But this is not the best approach.” (Staff member South American NS)



The challenge for many Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies is in developing models for working in partnership with those living in these urban slums rather than just delivering services to them. The goal must be to develop strategies that support these communities in having a voice in the decision-making that affects them. This in itself serves as a key rationale for volunteer engagement. But extreme disadvantage and poverty also provide challenges for fostering engaging people in these communities as volunteers.

For some National Societies, this has meant developing more creative livelihoods approaches to community engagement to ensure greater participation, where all participants benefit from engagement either financially or in other ways.

“We do have problems with retention. We are one of the poorest countries in the world and people need help. So we started these income-generating activities. We have very fertile land, so we have volunteers who will work on our land and then they get some of the profits and then some of the profits go to helping the work of the Red Cross. This has been very successful, we doubled our volunteers this way.” (Leader, Central African NS)

For others, addressing this challenge has meant a longer and more careful approach to working within existing community structures and supporting local empowerment. But for most, it has forced a re-think of more formal approaches in which volunteers are recruited and trained to deliver services to populations.

Case study

Working with, rather than for, urban communities

Jane Usher is an extremely poor community on the south side of Belize City with high rates of unemployment, drug use, teenage pregnancy, poverty, crime and violence. In part due to the violence, few NGOs work there. The Belize Red Cross began engaging the community in Jane Usher around four years ago. They had received funding to support disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities. Built on swampy flood plains below sea level, residents of Jane Usher suffer disproportionately from tropical storms.

The Belize Red Cross began slowly by reaching out to other organisations that had had some engagement with Jane Usher previously. National Society representatives also met with relevant government departments and then started engaging community leaders and other key stakeholders. They slowly recruited volunteers, including some young people who were passionate about their community. Some of the volunteers were tired of only hearing negative things about their community and wanted to show that there were positive things there as well.

The Belize Red Cross worked closely with local leaders, building trust and developing an understanding of the issues facing the community, in particular, the challenges they faced with climate change and disaster-risk reduction. A Community Disaster Risk Reduction Team was formed, trained, equipped. That team then led the project, addressing the key risks in their community.

The experience turned out to be extremely empowering for the community, which was able to successfully implement strategies they designed. Along the way, they developed a growing confidence to mobilise and address other issues. After the DRR project had concluded, the risk-reduction team morphed into a community-owned organisation, which went on to be legally incorporated that could submit its own proposals for small, community projects. The organization received training and official recognition as community health workers by the Ministry of Health in Belize.

The support that the community received from the Red Cross was a powerful catalyst; helping the community members address their own issues and enhance their skills in organizing and mobilizing resources to deliver projects.

Given the expected further growth of urban populations, there is an urgent need to develop our understanding of the specific challenges this presents for volunteer-using organisation, and to explore and synthesize models of volunteering that work effectively within these contexts.

The changes to communities shaped by patterns of migration and urbanisation will continue to impact social cultures and norms around volunteering, necessitating adapted and sometimes transformed models of volunteer engagement and management. If National Societies cannot be flexible and adapt the types and models of volunteering opportunities they offer, as well as their outreach efforts, they will struggle to engage the diversity of groups that increasingly characterize their countries' demographics.

This will not only have an impact on the capacity of National Societies to develop and deliver programmes and other initiatives. Failing to adapt to new

realities could also close off opportunities for many diverse communities to engage with volunteerism and to be exposed to the many benefit it can bring. An example of this can also be seen in the context of the relationship between volunteering and older people.

Ageing societies and volunteering

Many National Societies that took part in the GRoV (particularly in developing countries), felt that in their countries there was a strong focus on engaging young people or other groups, but that there was not as much focus or prioritisation on older people's participation.

"We concentrate too much on the youth, because the youth is the future of the country, and we must prepare them, right? We talk a lot about that, but I also think we need to focus on the elderly because, apart from being a much larger future population, they are people that have knowledge ... and we can take advantage of that with volunteer work within our organisation. On the other hand, we can offer them a more healthy, socially inclusive lifestyle. For the future of volunteering, we must include the elderly in our proposals." (Volunteer Manager, South American NS)

The exception to this phenomena was within the global North countries which by and large have already experienced a rapidly ageing population. In these countries, older people already made up a substantial number of the volunteers and the greater challenges have been in securing mass youth engagement. In middle- or lower-income countries, however, youth make up more than half and sometimes as much as 80 per cent of volunteers. And yet, soon, for the first time in history there will be more people in the world aged over 60 than there are under 15 (UN DESA 2012).

Hans Rosling observes that demographically we have reached 'peak child'; the number of children and young people in the world will now level out or decline (Rosling 2014). Older populations will continue to grow, adding some 1 billion extra to their total in the coming years. While this shift is expected to happen in Africa in the latter part of this century, all other regions of the world are experiencing these changes sooner, particularly in Asia. This shift will have significant impact not just on the kinds of services we will need to provide but also on our volunteer approaches.

Internal research and experience reveal some very compelling reasons to strengthen our focus on older volunteers. The IFRC's Urban Volunteering study for instance indicated that "all other things equal (even when length of service, training and other variables associated with age are taken into account), older people tend to stay longer in the organisation and, on average, in a typical week, they tend to give more of their time to volunteering. This age group, therefore, represents a largely unexplored source for more sustainable volunteering"⁷

The ageing populations in many countries are also retiring earlier. As a result, some National Societies have observed that these retirees will likely be healthier for much longer and have well-developed skills, experience and time on their hands. Their participation, it was posited, may still manifest differently to that of previous senior volunteers, perhaps more focused on using their specific skills, seeing results and in balancing their participation in volunteering with other interests.

⁷ *Urban Volunteering Study found that those aged 50 years and over contribute, on average, half a day more per week than those aged 15 to 19 years.*

In addition to the potential contributions from older volunteers, some National Societies also observed that there were significant health and social benefits for the individual volunteers, an issue that has also been explored in other settings (e.g. Hardill and Baines 2009)

“Look, I see it like this: we live in a country where, in the future, we will have many more elderly people. As for the issue of elderly people volunteering, apart from the quality of their professionalism within the institution, this volunteer needs to be mentally active. The Red Cross's volunteer programme offers mental activity to the elderly, because in many cases there is no space for the elderly in our society. They don't have a way to activate all their knowledge and volunteer work gives them the opportunity to maintain their professional qualities and knowledge active.” (Staff member, South American NS)

In some countries despite rapidly growing senior populations, the National Societies have struggled to engage older people in volunteering. For some, such as those in many former Soviet countries, there are still negative connotations associated with volunteerism. For others, there are additional issues such as poverty.

“Also with our elderly, that are not so active, they are passive. Also because the most of them are very poor, so that's why it's very difficult to involve them and to explain to them that it would be useful for them to be socially more active.” (Eastern European NS)

For National Societies that have had a volunteer base constituted mostly of young people, engaging elders in volunteer work has been a particular challenge.

“The main challenge is just, you need to have what we call volunteers who are coming from different groups, or maybe clans, or maybe then different ages, whatever. But then the challenge is the age now. You know, we are only recruiting people who are under 30 years of age. We are not reaching the other level of the age bracket, between 40 and 50.” (West African NS)

Within this study, and amongst developing countries, it was National Societies within Asia and South America that most frequently cited issues relating to the challenge of engaging ageing populations. While it was clear that many saw looming severe implications for social and humanitarian services from a rapidly ageing population, (the need for greater blood collection service, for instance, was often mentioned as an upcoming challenge), most also saw opportunities. As one volunteer manager from a Central American National Society noted, retired professionals with skills might offer a wealth of experience, but how does the National Society make the most of those skills.

Some also believed that there was going to be a need to strengthen our work with young people to ensure a volunteer pool capable of supporting more significant elderly needs, as noted by an East Asian National Society

“The aging society is one of external trends that impacts National Society volunteering. National Society services need to change to further accommodate the needs of the elderly people. This has also set a challenge for the National Society to recruit more young volunteers.”

Some National Societies were also investing in inter-generational approaches to attempt to bridge what they sometimes viewed as a widening gap. One East Asian National Society, for example, has developed an activity that matched youth volunteers with elderly people living in slums. The young person was

matched with a retired person who had previously worked in an area that the young person was interested in pursuing as a vocation. Retired carpenters or hairdressers, for example, were matched with young people who aspired to these jobs. So while the young person would help the older person with household chores, the older person would also teach their former profession, both benefitting from the experience.

These models are proliferating around the world, and many organisations in developing countries are also beginning to grapple with how to engage older populations into volunteerism. This, like many areas in volunteering, is under investigated, documented and researched; there would be considerable advantages in reaching a deeper understanding or successful approaches to engaging senior volunteers. This is an area where much of the work undertaken in the last few decades in developed countries with senior volunteering may provide some useful learning in other contexts.

In developing such an agenda, however, it is essential to situate future research firmly within an understanding of the different ways ageing is understood in different places. This understanding must also be informed by the complex, wider shifts and changes that shape older people's life courses and their capacity to address contemporary societal challenges. This highlights the importance of developing research and programmes in partnership with NGOs and other actors working with ageing populations.

Creating new communities: beyond 'online volunteering'

While the GRoV did not specifically seek to explore technology and volunteering, many National Societies in developing countries cited both challenges and opportunities relating to the rapid advancement of technology in their countries in relation to volunteering. Despite how much is written about online volunteering and despite its advancements in recent years, the vast majority of National Societies in developing countries aren't utilising this kind of volunteering, or are doing so to a very minor extent. For the most part, National Societies in developing countries appeared to be consistently focused on how to develop in-person strategies.

"[In terms of] online volunteers, we have very few because when we have some activities we have a gathering of the people. We have concrete activities, person-to-person, and this online [volunteering], at this stage, is not very necessary. We have online volunteers or support when it is necessary to make some kind of comment on some document and then we ask someone who is an expert for certain area to give his own opinion or to make some remarks or something like that. But mainly it is activity face to face, person to person."
(East European NS)

Online volunteering was proliferating in many middle-income countries and in most developed countries, though overall it still remained a very minor part of overall volunteering. This is not surprising given that much of National Societies' work relies on people supporting people face-to-face; in just a handful of cases did online volunteers total any more than 1 per cent of any National Society's total volunteer pool.



“[Online volunteering] is important, it can help. But at the end of the day, when a disaster hits, we need people on the ground. We need them pulling others out of the water, or going door-to-door in areas where communications are down or in remote areas. We can’t replace that yet.” (IFRC development expert, Asia)

However, it was also abundantly clear that National Societies everywhere see online and other technological platforms as a form of community with its own norms, language, cultures and behaviours. The extent to which they have been able to engage with these communities has been limited.

Some National Societies in highly developed countries have been able to build and engage substantial online volunteer communities. The American Red Cross and British Red Cross, for instance, have developed an online mapping community to assist during major disasters. Located in countries all over the world, members of this online community number in the thousands. Using a combination of open-source information and field reports, they create maps that can then be used by responders in the field. The maps are continuously updated on 24-hour cycles by volunteers based in all time zones. Interestingly, many of the volunteer mappers come from developing countries themselves. This has then produced a network of people who may never meet in person but who work collaboratively to support major disaster responses.

Similarly, the IFRC launched a Facebook group for Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers to provide a space for volunteers across the world to connect and share programming examples and ideas. Within its first eight months, the group had grown to 25,000 members from more than 150 countries. Members post regularly from all over the world, sharing examples of volunteer initiatives, asking advice and connecting with each other. An event designed by the group for World Red Cross Red Crescent Day, asked volunteers to send in photos of what they were doing on that day. The initiative was an attempt to display

some of the scale of things that volunteers achieve each day. The online event received more than 3,000 photos from 110 countries on that day. A [short video](#) was made summarising those contributions.

In Kenya, where the Red Cross struggles with many more applications for volunteering than it can possibly accommodate, an online volunteering initiative was conceived called iVolunteer, and the platform received 200,000 registrations within 2 months of its launch. Over the years and in various incarnations, the platform has served as a user-led, citizen advisory service about traffic accidents and delays, where citizens would photograph and send in pictures of accidents or disrupted roads to alert motorists who already struggle under heaving Nairobi traffic. It also was used as a coordination tool when informal taxi drivers went on strike and people mobilised to arrange car-pooling for stranded travellers. It has been used to help spread campaign messages, support fund-raising and as a tool to encourage citizen reporting on disasters and other humanitarian issues, among other things.

Through this study, it also became clear that in some parts of the developing world, technological advancements were taking hold and had already dramatically impacted the expectations and engagement patterns of young people particularly. Many National Societies had made attempts to engage with online volunteer communities or to build tools that would make access to the Red Cross and Red Crescent easier through online pathways.

“It should be mentioned that country’s significant and dynamic socio-economic, technological development demands a new approach towards volunteers, as well as taking into account their interests. Being mainly youth, the volunteers prefer to use their free time learning and using communication technologies and having contacts via social networks. The National Society adapts its services towards that and makes attractive its web page by creating links to social network pages, renewing its activities and campaigns towards new trends. (Leader, Central Asian National Society)

Case study **Using Online Tools to make recruitment more effective**

When the Swedish Red Cross recently overhauled its cumbersome and administratively heavy system of volunteer recruitment, it struck on a unique idea for volunteer registration that delivered many benefits. Capitalising on the popularity of online games such as ‘find out what kind of super hero you are’ or which Star Wars character best suits your personality’, the Swedish Red Cross developed a ‘what kind of volunteer are you?’ test.

As part of the game, prospective volunteers are asked 30 personality related questions. At completion of the test, the candidates are provided a series of options for volunteer roles that may suit them, which they can then directly apply for online. This helps make navigating the system much easier for volunteers and reduces time they would spend exploring roles they are not suited for. The information gleaned from the tests also helps volunteer managers better adapt their support mechanisms for volunteers and to develop new marketing campaigns to target potential volunteers.

Advances in access to technology has also helped expose many Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers to practices in other countries. They have become more

connected through online groups and communities that stretch across borders. Where previously most volunteers would have had little chance to engage with volunteers in other parts of their own country, they can now directly access volunteers from all over the world. This has not only helped build a sense of unity and common purpose, it contributes to building pride in the work of the organisation. It has also influenced their thinking about services and activities, and has helped to shape their views on volunteerism. These online communities have also helped to open up knowledge networks and create spaces where people can both share and engage with learning.

“When people see Red Cross emblems [in various social media platforms], through all the conflict areas, or natural hazards, like in Haiti, like in Japan earthquake, they see Red Cross working. So, volunteers are encouraged that actually this is a global village, so to continue to do better things. And they see the postings, you understand? They even see our Red Cross becoming this big member with American Red Cross, British Red Cross, Swiss Red Cross. So joining all these things, they have all these influences how to do, and in programming they copy, or they domesticate what they see from the Tweeting pages, Facebook pages. So they do, they see all these programmes and they copy them, they domesticate them here.” (Volunteer manager, West African NS)

“In as much as we are in a third-world country, you realise that particularly for the young people, exposure to the global world I think will have an effect. It might offer both positive and negative: positive in that they will also appreciate how volunteerism works in the global, in the advancing economy and that that in itself I think will be a big plus.” (Volunteer leader, Southern African NS)

An initiative launched by the IFRC made an attempt to build these connections and communities and to enhance knowledge sharing and a sense of common purpose. The Randomised Coffee Trials randomly matches participants to another volunteer or staff member from anywhere in the world. Then the pair that have been matched have one month to organise a skype and coffee chat. The next month, everyone is sent a new match. Some 1,000 people from 80 countries have participated. While no formal work agenda was proposed for the coffee matches, an evaluation found that one-third had multiple contacts with their match and that the initiative did contribute to a sense of pride and motivation for the organisation, led to tangible developments in projects, programmes and activities across areas as diverse as disaster education, IT management and youth development.

A number of National Societies also observed that technological advancements were providing a new set of needs to address – those of people and communities who were excluded from the significant technological gains in their country. In several cases, National Societies are developing programmes in which volunteers help others develop computer skills so that they can better connect with the changing world around them.

The emergence of social media and its impacts observed in this study appeared to be reaching most National Societies in one way or another, although its reach was dependent on the development status of the country and on who had access to technology within those countries. Building a social media presence has been a major priority for almost nine out of ten National Societies in developing and middle-income countries over recent years.

“Today social media plays an active role in volunteer activities. The Red Cross tries to use modern and innovative methods in involvement and managing of volunteers. Volunteers

and staff are encouraged to use twitter, Facebook and other social media to be in line with new trends.” (Central Asian NS)

Some National Societies in developing countries had found that technology (and young people) had advanced far quicker than they were able to keep up with given limited resources. There is also often a considerable digital divide between the headquarters based in the capital or largest city and the many branch offices that typically stretch out all over the country. While the headquarters may have more reliable access to internet and computers, very often many of the branches may not even have a computer. If they do, they often find internet access to be either patchy or too expensive to use regularly. It is clear that many are struggling to enable the whole of their organisation to have access to technology.

“Information technology is developing so fast here and also has an impact on volunteering. Young volunteers are familiar with internet and social media. They want to search information about the organization before registering to be volunteers. They also want to register online. Currently we do not have capacity to anticipate the needs. We are at the very first steps to improve capacity in terms of volunteer management. For example, we are working on formulizing regulations, reviewing monitoring tools and developing a volunteer database.” (South East Asian NS)

“In the last 15 years, information technology has had such an impact on young people that it has become part of their lives. The fact of not including, not having or not providing [internet] service in the branch offices is really counterproductive for us. This is why young people get bored. I think that the problem is an outdated volunteering management model.” (Latin American NS)

Despite all the noise about technological reach, advancement and the proliferation of online communities, a considerable digital divide still exists for many, which severely limits the access these National Societies and their volunteers have to the gains and benefits being experienced by and between other National Societies.

“No. No. Our National Society does not use online services. And internet is still not even here.” (Leader, Central African NS)

“Unfortunately, access to the internet is unavailable everywhere and it may succeed in some places and fail in others. (Middle Eastern NS)

“(Here) it’s very limited, the volunteers in the remote area first of all they have problem of the connections and secondly [they have a problem with] the knowledge and possibility. (South/Central Asian NS)

The management of databases was another key priority for many National Societies in developing their technological approaches to volunteering. Online databases were extremely rare in developing countries. In fact, less than half of National Societies questioned had any kind of electronic, national databases. Some had developed very advanced approaches to this where volunteers can interact online as communities, register for training, record their participation and organize volunteers’ shifts and activities. But these examples – mainly across North America and Western Europe and in isolated parts of Asia – were in the minority.

Conclusion

While much volunteering research tends to work within the context of particular projects, here we have shown the importance of addressing the ways large-scale socio-economic shifts are changing the communities in which volunteers work and from which volunteers are drawn.

Furthermore, we have seen how these changes are interconnected, and that volunteer-using organisations need to address overlapping dynamics that can challenge established patterns of working and dominant understandings of volunteering.

Engaging with diverse interpretations and trying to accommodate them within existing frameworks is not enough if it effectively retains the Movement's 'culture' of volunteering at the centre, rather than allowing it to be challenged and transformed by new and diverse influences. Undertaking such transformative work is far from straightforward, but it goes to the heart of how a global organisation understands, supports and mobilises volunteering in varied settings with diverse communities.

Enabling volunteering in the context of dramatic societal change demands an openness to difference and requires innovative, hybrid and flexible approaches at the local level, supported and facilitated at the global organisational level – even if the results may challenge established volunteering 'norms'.



Chapter 3

Volunteering Economies

This chapter explores the issue of remuneration and incentives, their relationship to aid and development spending. It argues that global norms around ‘payment’ do not necessarily capture the complexity of how volunteer remuneration shapes who volunteers and why. The chapter also highlights how aid and development spending are shaping patterns of remuneration, creating volunteering hierarchies that have wider implications for sustainable, local volunteering activity.

“In the past, when we were young men, I remember my father and mother urged me to join the Red Crescent to learn first aid and participate in activities. They used to give me pocket money to go. Now, the situation is different. Because of poverty, parents now expect their sons to get an income from working at the Red Crescent.” (Middle Eastern National Society)

Paying volunteers beyond expenses is a contentious issue for many volunteer-involving organisations. It is often claimed that this runs counter to established ideas of voluntarism and creates challenges in the legal classification of volunteers as distinct from waged or salaried employees. This has become a pressing issue for the Red Cross and Red Crescent in recent years and is increasingly significant in the context of the global promotion of volunteering as a development tool and the identification of ‘non pecuniary motivation’ as part of how volunteering is defined (UNV 2011).

Data gathered as part of this review indicates that this phenomenon is being felt most severely in developing countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and among small-island developing states. There were also some reports that this issue was affecting some countries in Latin America and Europe. In all of these areas, National Societies indicated that other major international agencies and, in some instances, local organisations were also engaging in the practice.

Remuneration has been subject to growing attention among scholars and policy makers (Wilson 2007, Sunkutu and Nampanya-Serpell 2009, Graham, et al. 2013, Kasteng et al. 2015), although work in the area tends to be fragmented across disciplines and sectors. There has been particular attention to the role of payment and remuneration for community health workers, whose local knowledge have been mobilised in the context of health challenges such as those around HIV/AIDS (Maes et al. 2011), but as a means of providing ‘service delivery on the cheap’ (Boesten et al. 2011).

Despite the fact that many who were interviewed in this review identified remuneration as a major emerging issue (or in some cases a well-established issue), overall it has not received the attention it warrants. Furthermore, our research reveals that it is important to look beyond the headlines and rhetoric around 'paid volunteering', and to pay attention to the complex factors shaping remuneration and the different ways this affects who volunteers, how, why and where. Within his commentaries on the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, Jean Pictet reflects on the principle of voluntary service, acknowledging that it is not so important whether or not volunteers are paid but rather that they come to the work voluntarily; he likens it to the difference between being conscripted or voluntarily joining the military (Pictet 1979). But this understanding is much more complex than standard definitions suggest, demanding attention to the complex and shifting factors that shape how people come to volunteer.

It was clear in this study that for some, financial motivation was an important factor shaping volunteering. This is not the same as saying motivation can be reduced to issues of remuneration (Pawlby 2003, p.69, Wilson 2007) or that remuneration means one thing across settings. Not recognising the importance of diverse forms of remuneration can affect capacity to engage communities, while conversely applying payments without an understanding of context can, as demonstrated later in the report, destabilise or even undermine community volunteerism. This then has implications for the apparently 'neutral' definitions that are being deployed by international organisations as the global 'norms' around volunteering. It also prompts us to think about whether a workable alternative definition can be constructed in the context of these complexities, and in the context of changing forms of volunteering within and between places.

As shown in previous chapters, the contexts in which people volunteer are characterised by increasingly complex situations, changing demographics and dynamic social structures. The GRoV indicates that persistent poverty and its changing dynamics, unemployment and economic crises are, in general, contributing to making volunteerism in developing countries more challenging to maintain. In addition, the ways in which aid and development projects are funded is making their delivery through volunteerism both more common and, at times, more challenging.

At the same time, volunteerism is positioned as a significant feature of service delivery and development as the role of the state is rolled back in many countries and the ambition of the coming SDGs makes it clear that volunteers will be required for most of the targets to be achieved (see conclusion). These are among the significant factors that we broadly refer to as 'volunteering economies', and that are shifting volunteering practice mainly within developing countries. This chapter will explore the implications of these issues, their dynamics and relationships, and propose some solutions for moving forward. It is worth noting that even the language that we use to explore this issue is contested, with movement and slippage between how terms such as reimbursement, per diems, payment and incentives are deployed within and between places. Given the complexity of this issue, and insufficient space to explore this in detail here, more detailed analysis of the findings will be presented in specific outputs addressing volunteer remuneration in the future.

Payment, incentives and reimbursement

The growth of ‘paid’ volunteering and what is meant by ‘paid’, changes with context, and it is unclear where and when it became a broader feature of the sector. It has been particularly associated with the growing engagement of community health volunteers, as noted above, while respondents to our study noted seeing it in major disaster responses. One National Society from the Middle East noticed the practice emerge once a plethora of international organisations appeared in their country to address the growing refugee crisis;

“You know it was you the foreign organisations who started this practice of paying volunteers. Before that, we didn’t have a problem with it. Now all the volunteers want to get paid.”

Wider research has also associated the growth of ‘payment’ with the activities of international development actors (Lewis 2014, p.38). Regardless of its origins, the GRoV indicates that in recent years it has become more prevalent (to the point of normalisation in some areas) and considerably more disruptive. This chapter focuses predominantly on the experience of volunteering in the global South, and its relationship to aid and development spending. But our research also indicates that the practice of paying volunteers is also developing to a lesser degree in the global North.

Debate often centres on the different types of reimbursement and incentivization and whether this should go beyond reimbursement of expenses for undertaking volunteer work. However, prioritising alternative forms of ‘reward’, such as training or provision of uniforms, risks sidestepping some of the challenges around this issue. While this may offset some of the pitfalls of remuneration that we discuss later, they also bring with them their own problems, notably around engagement of poor people as volunteers. Key in our discussion here is a commitment to flexibility and to avoiding rigid dismissal of the complexities that we have identified in the light of global ‘norms’ around what counts as volunteering.

The IFRC Volunteering policy calls for “National Societies (to) reimburse volunteers for preapproved expenditure related to their volunteering tasks” (IFRC 2011). This policy is critical in ensuring equality of opportunity; the capacity of people and communities who are experiencing extreme poverty to access volunteering opportunities is a central issue for all National Societies. This also helps, in our efforts to work with people and communities as genuine partners rather than just as ‘beneficiaries’ who have things done ‘to’ and ‘for’ them. It is an important policy that aims to ensure we are able to continue to promote diversity in the volunteer pool. No-one should be prevented from volunteering because they cannot afford it. Implementation of this policy is complicated, however.

Reimbursements and inequality

While in highly developed countries where resources are typically more plentiful, most National Societies have a policy of reimbursing expenses, many of the volunteers however don’t avail themselves of it, at times seeing it as part of their contribution to the cause. Nonetheless, in these environments

it ensures the means, if needed, for people from lower socio-economic parts of their countries to participate. It is worth observing, however, that National Societies operating in highly developed countries, have a staff to volunteer ratio of around 1:9, in the least developed countries that ratio is on average 1:180. Guaranteeing reimbursement for what is usually a much larger volunteer base within a resource-constricted environment is therefore far more problematic. If the Nigerian Red Cross, for instance, were to implement such a policy overnight they may need to dramatically reduce the size of their volunteer base (which currently stretches beyond 500,000). The same may be true for the Indonesian Red Cross, which has close to one million volunteers, or India, with more than 2 million volunteers. Providing basic reimbursement to all volunteers can be unrealistic for a great many National Societies; the GroV has revealed that in the Asia Pacific, for instance, only about 20 per cent of National Societies are able to offer regular reimbursements for their volunteers. Most, of those are in developed countries. Consequently many people, arguably those who would benefit most, are prevented from participating as volunteers.

“We really can’t afford to pay for the expenses of volunteers, which prevents a lot, particularly those in outer suburbs, from coming in to participate.” (West African NS)

“Earlier, we used to spend, for example, we give 350 rupees per volunteer for their reimbursement, but now we don’t have a fund to do that type of expense, cover their expenses. And because our volunteers are, they come from very poor family and most of them are jobless people, so they cannot cover their bus fares, and their needs. That is the problem we are facing now. That’s the main reason for the reduced length of their volunteering. (South Asian NS)

Most National Societies try to provide some in-kind support in lieu of formal reimbursement. In Africa, almost all National Societies tried to provide this kind of support for at least some of their volunteers:

“A person who can work a whole day, for example –, and it is certain that one needs at least to provide water to have energy – and it’s obvious we must also take into account the (other) subsistence needs of volunteers”

It was similar in other parts of the world, for instance in this Caribbean country;

“We don’t always have the funds to provide payment for expenses, but we will try and collect them up from home in the vehicle when we can and we will sometimes provide food for them.”

There were some divergent views on this issue. Some felt that in-kind support such as meals helped to preserve the ‘purity’ of volunteerism and were the only form of reimbursement that should be offered, while others felt that we should go further and not get too caught up in these differentiations.

“I think we shouldn’t over analyse this. Instead of trying to find more ways to give support that isn’t directly providing money... that is trying to give other support that actually has a financial value anyway, we should just get over it and give them the money. At least there is more dignity in that. Give them money and let them decide what they want to do with it.” (Leader - Middle Eastern NS)

The reality for many National Societies though is that only a small percentage of our 17 million volunteers receive any kind of regular reimbursement support, particularly since most of our volunteers reside in developing countries. Also important in this are the variations within regions; in Latin American countries

for instance, some branches that could afford it offered reimbursement, while others have avoided the practice.

Variations in incentivising, and in the ways this affects particular communities, individuals and countries, has implications for strategic planning and consistency across regions and within countries, as well as in shaping the ways volunteering within the organisation and community is understood. It also affects what volunteers and staff feel is expected of them by becoming part of the Movement. Such variation and uncertainty also raises questions about varied capacity to mobilise in different settings, and as we shall see, is connected to the capacity and scale of the Movement.

Aid and project funding

It would be easy to see unequal incentivization and reimbursement as a simple problem of lack of resourcing. In reality, there is more to it than first meets the eye. The ability to pay seems to be occurring in National Societies that as a rule cannot afford to offer reimbursements to the majority of its volunteer base. Instead, where there are funds from a foreign donor for the delivery of projects, 'per diem' payments are often made available to the volunteers who participate in the delivery of that specific project. It is important to note, then, that is not a simple issue of poorer National Societies not being able to pay, but one which is shaped by patterns of aid disbursement and their impact on National Societies, and the ways in which other actors manage and attract their volunteers.

As is widely recognised, the project focus of aid spending and the ways it changes over time is not neutral, impacting on local social institutions, including civil society organisations and actors. Volunteering and volunteers do not sit outside this context, and many international agencies rely on an existing local volunteer base to support project delivery. However, large foreign-funded projects are the main or majority source of income for some National Societies and their organization therefore is often preoccupied with the delivery of a set of projects that are generally externally funded and driven:

"But we don't, we're not in a financial position to be able to create new services based on the needs of the new, just because it's all funding based, really, and that's the only reason. It depends on what funding we can get." (Pacific islands NS)

And this reflection from another National Society in the Pacific:

I think Pacific-wide, we are struggling to keep our doors open, and I think although we see volunteers as a crucial investment in our sustainability, there's always other pressing issues that need to be resolved quite immediately. For example, if we were to weigh between investing in volunteers and paying the power bill, we'd pay the power bill. And most Pacific National Societies are not in a sustainable position to be able to develop volunteers. You know what I mean? Given the choice, yes, we will choose that but we have to pay our power, our phone, our internet and all of that, and then staff salary is another question, as well, and many of our National Societies in the Pacific rely on donor funds, which is why, to an extent, we've developed a culture where [donors] dictate to us how it should be done. And you do it, and it shouldn't be like that, but in many cases it's like that".

This practice can have many implications, including building organisational reliance on foreign donors to keep activities going and even to pay for core organisational costs, taking development decisions out of the hands of local

populations and organisations and instead delivering an agenda that is largely conceived and sometimes designed in the capital cities of global north countries. This finding from the GRoV is not particularly new in the context of wider development debates. But its impacts on volunteering are important, as volunteers are increasingly positioned as important development actors in aid and development policy who can work locally to ensure local sustainable action on poverty.

Many of the projects implemented by the Movement and other organisations have significant output demands and pressing timelines. These projects can be difficult to deliver through volunteering since they may require participation that is almost equivalent to full-time work or at the very least requires regular weekly commitment over a significant period, perhaps six months or longer. They also sometimes require the volunteers to have a developed, technical skill set. To ensure that these projects can be delivered requires a volunteer base that is highly engaged, skilled and with enough free time to deliver on the high demands of the project. Ensuring this base requires considerable, long-term investment in the development of inclusive and sustainable volunteerism. This can be unrealistic for some National Societies and, therefore, in order to make sure that the volunteer stays engaged, the project may offer small payments as incentives. However, this is unlikely to support a sustained volunteer base.

Those National Societies whose work is dominated by a succession of foreign-funded projects often find themselves constantly recruiting volunteers to deliver specific, pre-designed projects (whose volunteers may disperse once the project is completed), rather than building long-term engagement with communities to collaboratively address the manifold challenges facing them, something also raised in the recent Valuing Volunteering research led by Voluntary Service Overseas (Burns et al. 2015). This means that some National Societies will go through constant cycles of expansion and contraction rolling from one project to the next; volunteer numbers swell when they are recruited and paid to deliver a project and then drop off when the project is completed. If the National Society is then able to secure more funding in a few months time, they must then go and find volunteers again to deliver that project, when often the original volunteers have now disengaged and the process must start from scratch. This dynamic creates what we might call “pendulum organizations” for which community engagement sways and back and forth based on the priorities and vagaries of far-away funding mechanisms.

It is rare that any of these funded projects have room in their budgets for National Societies to invest in structures and initiatives that would promote more sustainable development-based volunteering at the community level. If there is any funding at all for volunteering development it is generally focussed on building the technical skills of the volunteers to deliver the project that is being funded. For example, a health promotion project may provide funding to deliver training on the technical aspects of the project and perhaps on health promotion and communication skills, but not to invest in the organisation building more sustainable and stronger roots with the communities that it serves.

The upshot of this is that some National Societies in developing countries are reliant on a funding base that in the long run is undermining their capacity to sustainably engage and mobilise communities into development initiatives. These experiences parallel and overlap with the ways wider aid and development funding have often produced a focus on projects and particular

deliverables rather than the much harder-to-track long-term change. This is significant in the current moment, where volunteering is celebrated as a good in itself – in terms of promoting volunteer well-being – as well as a key component of promoting sustainable social change. Without paying critical attention to the ways volunteering is being brought into the development sphere, it is unlikely to offer anything new and may in fact be more likely to be mainstreamed and absorbed in ways that diminish its potential and distinctive contributions.

We need to understand, therefore, how the roles of Movement volunteers differ in different places and what the impact is of being constructed in service delivery terms. For example, in such contexts, volunteers may be less able to act as representatives of their communities in decision-making processes. There were some indications in our study that volunteers who are paid per diems are less likely to advocate against the National Society for both their rights and that of their communities.

“If you complain, you risk being taken off the per diem list.” (Central African volunteer)

This is an important insight. Volunteers are often observed to be strong advocates for their own needs and for those of their communities. The introduction of a financial dynamic between them and their organisation can potentially shift a power balance, stifle this advocacy and act as a disincentive to speak out, weakening one of the most valuable elements of volunteerism.

Reinforcing inequalities

For those National Societies who are also engaged in other community-based initiatives in addition to the delivery of substantial foreign-funded projects, a different set of challenges can emerge, primarily because one set of volunteers may receive a payment while the others will not. The reality is that in many National Societies where payments (beyond expense reimbursement) are occurring, it is only for a minority of volunteers. This has the tendency to create a hierarchy and some discontent among volunteers. If the volunteers perceive a lack of transparency or clear process for assigning per diems it can also contribute to further disaffection and de-motivation.

The lack of reimbursement tends to disproportionately impact the more disadvantaged or marginalised, not only those that are experiencing significant poverty, but because it can combine with wider social inequalities as in the case of women’s participation. As one National Society in the Middle East pointed out:

“It is more complicated to invite women into the capital for training because we have to also pay for a man to travel with them, and they often have responsibilities at home that are hard to leave behind without extra financial support.”

Volunteer remuneration is at the centre of multiple overlapping volunteering and development economies that can reinforce and challenge existing social inequalities, as well as produce further hierarchies and stratifications. It is influencing how volunteering activity is differentiated and distributed among and between social groupings, and within country settings more broadly.

“It’s not fair, if you work on a project you can get some money, but if you are what we call community based, then you don’t get anything, not even reimbursements.” (West African NS)



“We have one project working with refugees, and where the volunteers they are getting paid an amount for every family they interview. If they are fast and they interview a lot of families in a day then they can get more money than the staff managing them. This causes a lot of resentment from some of the staff.” (Middle East NS)

The application of per diem, usually intended as an incentive, can have the opposite effect if there is little transparency or perceptions of bias in the decisions of who gets per diems and who doesn't. This can demotivate volunteers and contribute to a sense of inequity or injustice, sentiments they are often already very familiar with.

“Sometimes you can turn up and you're name is not on the list for per diems and you don't know why, it just isn't.” (Volunteer Central Africa)

Remuneration also has a role in shaping where volunteering takes place in countries and over what timeframes, connecting with the uneven ways development activity is produced in and across developing country settings (Bebbington 2004).

We tend to have more volunteers in a place where you are implementing [a] funded project. In areas where there are no projects, it's difficult to keep the volunteers, very, very difficult to keep them. So the challenge is how to keep the volunteers actually yeah (Zambia).

The capacity or otherwise to offer remuneration does not map directly onto existing inequalities in straightforward ways; remuneration is linked to the degree to which a particular place has attracted particular funded ‘project’ activity, shaping who is able to volunteer as well as what kinds of people are encouraged to volunteer. Volunteers who are mobile both spatially and socially can take advantage of better remunerated volunteering. Those more ‘fixed’ in areas of less ‘project’ interest, are then likely to receive less remuneration, since they are unable to cover basic expenses such as food and transport, excluding them from participation.

“When we ask a volunteer to do humanitarian work in an area, as in the West for example where humanitarian action is well established because of the different crisis that occurred, when we ask a volunteer to do social work in these areas, he tends to ask for money because other humanitarian organisations would give allowances or even salaries to people from village for the same social work. Therefore they expect the same from us although we do not work like that.” (West African NS).

An affordable and proximate source of labour

A language of ‘per diems’ and ‘reimbursements of costs’ seems to be employed in part at least, because it does not destabilise established definitions of volunteering in the same way that the language of ‘payment’ and ‘salary’ does. Volunteer payments then feature as part of the politics of how work and volunteering are labelled. As Jenkins notes in her work, the labelling of the money received by community health volunteers as a ‘tip’ had important implications for the feminist politics of the NGO she was researching (Jenkins 2009). If ‘volunteers’ are only provided ‘per diems’ then they can still be labelled volunteers. However, if they are provided payments, then this challenges the accepted definitions of volunteering and has more formal implications on rights, responsibilities such as contracts and taxes.

In some instances, it was reported that per diem payments being made to the volunteers were so significant that they more closely resemble wages, rather than reimbursement of expenses. In a number of cases, the ‘per diem’ would be equivalent to a minimum wage or even in some instances, a professional wage such as that of a teacher. In these cases, agencies using the language of ‘per diems’ are sometimes avoiding formal labour contracts by continuing to label them as volunteers. As one Middle Eastern NS reported:

“I think it’s harder to make them formal staff, even on short-term contracts. There is a lot of paperwork involved and it can sometimes be hard to get them off the contract once the project is finished. It is just more complicated. It’s easier to call them volunteers and pay a per diem.”

In other instances, where the payments were lower than professional or minimum wages but nonetheless came with an expectation of full-time or even regular part-time work, there is a reasonable argument to be made that it is resembling exploitative labour. A cheap and proximate source of labour is being employed under the guise of volunteering to deliver foreign-funded projects while avoiding some of the challenges and costs of ‘employment’. It also takes advantage of the often scant formal employment opportunities available.

These kinds of payments generally skirt around responsibilities such as paying social insurances and taxes for contract or part-time employees. They also deny access to a waged role for an individual who would be perceived as higher status and help them in future work opportunities if he or she had a full employment

contract. As such, it denies recognition of the skills and commitment required to fulfil such roles. It may also mean that job creation opportunities for young people are stymied by this shadow, paid volunteering culture.

At least one National Society from West Africa, disturbed by these emerging trends, were implementing initiatives to prevent volunteer work from feeling like a job, setting a limit on the number of hours a volunteer can donate to just 4 a week because “this is not their job.” This illustrates the importance of paying attention to contrasting understandings of volunteering and voluntarism within and across the movement, but also points to the significance of the local socio-economic setting.

Volunteering economies

Some National Societies that are either unable to offer remuneration (for lack of resources) or unwilling (as they feel it contravenes our Principles), have found themselves struggling with a competitive sector that is willing to offer these incentives;

“Other organisations steal our volunteers once they are trained. They offer them some small amounts of money to volunteer with them and so the volunteer leaves. Even the UN does this, but also small local organisations. We invest all this time and money in training them (the volunteers) and then they leave as soon as they are finished their training for someone who will pay them.” (Program Manager - West African NS)

“There is a lot of funding coming into the country for services and we see a lot of small charities just sort of pop up and they have money to deliver projects. But they don’t have any volunteers, so they pay volunteers to come and deliver their projects. Some of our volunteers are lured away by this.” (Leader - East European NS)

In these cases, the National Societies feel coerced into a practice they don’t want to implement lest they continue to lose their cadres of volunteers. In Asia Pacific, for instance, more than a quarter of National Societies also observed this issue; lower socio-economic groups are looking to agencies that can offer financial support for participation, which led to pressures within the National Societies to consider how they may change their incentivising practices.

In other cases there was a competitiveness created between agencies, indeed at times between various elements of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, where there was inconsistency in the levels of per diems paid. Some pay more than others, which leads understandably to ‘opportunity shopping’ between agencies by volunteers, particularly those with greater physical mobility and access to information on agency activity, who move between agencies depending on incentives being offered. This has been a pronounced component of the disaster response landscape for some time, but it is also normalising outside these contexts within development settings as well.

“For example, the United Nations has volunteers but they are very well paid. They are really well-paid. Their compensation is a thousand times ours. So that has an impact on volunteering. We also have what we call ‘community organiser’. They work for the government, the ministry of health. They operate a bit like our volunteers. They work and carry out activities in the community, but they also receive per diems. I must say also that some of these community organisers receive a salary. Our Red Cross volunteers don’t receive any money, so this will have an influence because they work within the same

communities. So there are volunteers who tend to blend in and become community organisers and later, they can come back to volunteer for the Red Cross once there is no more work to do with the government.” (South East African NS).

Economic crisis

The significance of patterns of remuneration and incentivization need to be understood in the wider economic context within which National Societies are working. Across the Global Review data, respondents identified recent and sustained economic challenges and crises as playing a key role in who volunteers and how. For some National Societies this was precipitated by an economic downturn and the view that much of the country was focussed on survival and unable to devote sufficient time to a volunteering act that brought no, or little financial compensation. For others it was closely tied to urbanisation and the different needs, lifestyles and dynamics of populations who are living in cities away from their traditional means of subsistence and under pressure to constantly make money, both for themselves and at times their wider family.

“Most of our volunteers are vulnerable because of our poor economy, and it affects our motive of volunteerism in general, of course, because now most of the people, they are vulnerable, and[are] getting something from this, from the organisations, even if it is something that is going to be built to their community level. They’re still expecting that with the funds that we are providing, or to volunteer, they can buy additional soap, etc. That’s the major thing, that is our poor economy in its impact on volunteerism, because now people don’t have that, from the olden days, where we know that, we are sitting with one another even in the fields, at home. That thing, it has affected a lot. Everything now is about money, the hard cash, so if people can get hard cash. It’s really affecting volunteerism in general.” (Southern Africa)

For a small number of countries respondents felt it was symptomatic of shifting priorities, markets and needs, that there were higher degrees of materialism or a diminished status of volunteerism.

“But now with the economic crisis, the material values are on the increase and people are in survival mode. This, has led to a reduction in the interest and commitment of volunteers.” (East European NS)

In countries in the global South particularly, most respondents indicated economic challenges as a major negative influence impacting formal volunteering within organisations. In both Africa and the MENA regions, for instance, more than half of National Societies cited this as one of the major challenges facing them in retaining volunteers.

In some instances, particularly within Global North countries, the crises were found to have had some positive impacts, building feelings of solidarity and charity in the community, or perhaps because people had more time on their hands, or may have been seeking opportunities to enhance employability.

“Without a doubt the crisis has resulted in a higher number of volunteers, they have more availability.... Also all the services that deal with the fight against the economic crisis are popular with volunteers.” (Western Europe NS)

“The economic crisis, or the feeling that one exists, strengthens commitment. With the perception of the economic crisis there is a feeling that we are going through a moral crisis where people no longer speak to one another and that there is a need to bring back social ties.” (Western Europe NS)

Case study Coming together in hard times

"We had a huge collapse in our economy in 2008 so the atmosphere has been changing so fast. I was here in 2007 when the boom was at its highest and everyone was too busy to volunteer. They were just working overtime and earning a lot of money and going abroad and so on and then this collapse comes in the fall of 2008 and there is a very big change in the minds of the whole nation. People were much more positive towards volunteering. In 2007, we had the programmes we needed the volunteers but no one wanted to volunteer. Then we experienced a boom in volunteering (after the crash) as people were much more willing and had much more free time. For the first time since after the Second World War, we had high numbers of unemployed people, people that were very active and were very willing to come and do something with their free time." (Western European NS)

Similar experiences were noted in some developing countries — that the economic challenges had increased feelings of solidarity although severity of the issues meant that people's struggle for survival often outweighed their desire to express solidarity through formal volunteerism.

"(The) major impact is related to long-lasting economic crisis and its impact on the National Society as a whole. However there are negative and positive aspects of crisis. On a positive side, there is evidence of increased solidarity within the society and on negative side there is a direct impact on volunteering because if people are struggling for survival there is not much time for many of them to start or continue volunteering in the Red Cross." (West African NS)

For the great majority of National Societies in the global South, the economic crises and challenges have brought significant additional struggle to the meaningful engagement of people with volunteering. At the community level, a great many are experiencing the persistent effects of poverty, particularly within those communities that the RC seeks to engage with. These are usually the same communities that the RC seeks to mobilise volunteers from within.

"The slowdown in the economy and the global recession have an impact on us, so that has an impact on the population. They are always affected. People become more vulnerable. Our volunteers are very vulnerable. They like to help people but they are also vulnerable. That is due to our situation in terms of poverty." (South Eastern Africa)

Our study has found, volunteers still have motivations relating to humanitarian imperatives (and many of the volunteers interviewed through this process likewise confirmed this motivation). But they were also looking for some form of remuneration to be a part of the equation. This could be in the form of gaining some benefits also from the services being provided:

"Because, I mean, the cost of living is very high, there are high levels of unemployment. So you find they will want to join, to become a volunteer, having at the back of their mind that maybe it's another way they can survive. They are hoping as they offer their services, there will be some incentives of some sort that will assist them to maybe take care of their families." (Southern African NS)

"Many volunteers would act this way and prefer to work for organisations that would give them something in return, especially as there are no jobs available and unemployment is

persistent nowadays. I would say that this has a negative impact on voluntary work.”
(West African NS)

“We used to have people coming, giving their time freely to an organisation. But with the high cost of living you find people today are thinking, ‘I need to get extra, earn extra money.’ So, instead of the time that they would give to an organisation they’d rather do some extra work, extra duties, go for overtime I would say.” (South Eastern Africa)

Without some sort of financial incentive it appears increasingly difficult to attract volunteers. As one African National Society noted: *“When we have an activity, projects which can give them a small per diem, the volunteers are very motivated, and arrive en masse.”* Yet another poignantly reflected; *“when you tell [the volunteer] there is no project line for per diem, (then) there is no project line for motivation.”*

These findings however do not suggest financial incentives are increasingly the main or only motivation of volunteers. Rather, they are part of complex and shifting volunteering economies, produced through the changes detailed here and in the previous chapter. Graham et al. (2013) argue that in a society where poverty is rampant, and unemployment is skyrocketing (p.17), there is an expectation of payment for volunteering (p.12) since some volunteers might try to use volunteering as a source of income. This was supported in our study.

“Volunteering as such without a backdrop of some sort of remuneration would be difficult to develop more, because we have a young population which is looking for employment and one must necessarily ensure the replacement of that.” (Volunteer Manager - African National Society)

“Volunteerism today isn’t the volunteerism of yesterday. People cannot afford to give you a lot of time for nothing.” (Volunteer Leader Middle Eastern National Society)

“If I have no food to eat, I’m not healthy, if I’m not healthy how can I help people.”
(Volunteer central america)

“My participation in volunteering is complicated because I work a lot, I don’t belong to the privileged class of my country, if I don’t work I don’t eat and some members in my family depend economically on me” (Volunteer South America)

Another rural branch in western Africa also noted social expectations and gender issues.

“The men here are expected to make money if they are out all day. They are expected to come home with something.”

Still, in identifying the ways a changing socio economic reality shapes why people volunteer, it is important to not reduce people’s actions solely to a form of economic rationality; other humanitarian and social imperatives also continue to clearly play a part:

“Yes we do (pay per diems), but they are motivated regardless. At the end of the day, the volunteer needs to feel valued, they are important and that they are cherished.” (East African NS)

“Yes they do get paid, but I don’t think this is the only reason they are doing it, they are also upset by the numbers of their people dying and want to make a contribution.” (Middle Eastern NS)

“First for me, it’s helping people, saving lives, even if I didn’t get paid I would still do it.”
(Volunteer Central African National Society)

What we can see then are the ways in which remuneration needs to be situated in the complex interplay of different motivations and pressures, which are different within and between different places. It is important to avoid suggesting a dichotomy of global South volunteering being largely to do with ‘economic survival’ and global North volunteering more rooted in affluence and ‘care’. However, we also need to acknowledge that the changing pressures to offer remuneration in the global South are having significant impacts and challenging dominant understandings of what is meant by and understood as volunteering.



Impacts on Concepts of Volunteerism

These myriad factors (unemployment levels, extreme poverty, competition, social pressures, the pressures of high demand project delivery funded by foreign donors) have for some NSs conspired to make volunteering more challenging to deliver. The impacts of this shift have been profound. Perhaps most significantly, some felt that it is undermining the spirit of volunteerism in their communities, something about which many of the respondents felt extremely passionate.

“This type of volunteering (paying volunteers beyond expenses), is at best distorting community volunteerism and at worst undermining it.” (Central African NS)

“(This is a) trend that is killing the spirit of volunteerism in the communities...it forces us to defend the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and that is disgusting.” (East African NS)

“The concept of volunteerism (without financial incentive) seems to be slipping not only in our country but in Africa as a whole.” (West African NS)

It was clear that in a number of countries, particularly in Africa, that financial incentive is now an integral component of the landscape of volunteering. In one Central African country we visited, every one of the many thousands of volunteers we encountered were receiving some financial incentive for their participation. When asked if they would still participate even if they weren't being paid, the volunteers indicated that they would but that it would be difficult.

One National Society from Europe that implemented a project funded by their government in a middle-eastern country, one of the poorest in the world, recounts a case study that provides a compelling example of the impact financial incentives can have on volunteering.

“We came to implement this project in a branch that was already existing and was delivering a lot of activities in the community. It was an extremely rural area and very impoverished. Our project was quite large, it provided a lot of funding and we gave per diems to the volunteers. The project brought a lot of good to the community and was able to achieve a lot. But when we went back 6 months after the project had finished, the branch was doing almost no activities anymore. When we asked ‘why’ the response was that they didn't have any money or resources to do anything and couldn't get people to volunteer. But when we looked at it, prior to our implementing our project there were a lot of activities going on, with lots of volunteers. They just mobilised resources from within their own community, getting by with what they had. Our project upset that dynamic, and seemed to have reduced their resilience in the long run as a result.”

It is clear that more research is needed into the specific ways financial incentives shape volunteering motivation in specific places. To date, this research has tended to focus on the global North and to concentrate on how it affects retention and wider project and organisational effectiveness, notwithstanding some important exceptions (Wilson 2007, Lewis 2014). Furthermore, we need a better understanding of how remuneration shapes wider volunteering economies, and the ways this connects with historical patterns of volunteerism and meanings of volunteering.

One National Society that we visited indicated that not only did it shift the expectations of the current volunteers but it also shifted those of potential volunteers from the broader community.

“Yes we paid our volunteers in a project, I suppose it was quite a lot, about the same as a teacher would get. The other volunteers started to ask why aren’t we getting paid. But worse than that, word got around in the community that we were paying volunteers and so we had a lot of applications from people whose expectation was that they would get paid for their volunteering. It has taken a very long time to reverse this, even now (2 years later), we still get some people applying who think you’re going to get paid.” (Caribbean NS)

The pressing concern in some regions and countries, with this practice, is that it is undermining local coping mechanisms that have for millennia served to help people maintain resilience in the face of numerous challenges and threats and often in the countries that need these support structures the most.

The GRoV confirms that crises and pressure can foster greater local solidarity. But the practice of (frequently) foreign organisations adding a financial dimension to what has previously been conceived of as an intrinsic component of solidarity and mutual support can be seen in some instances as weakening those critical support structures.

There must be some caution however with this evidence; the claim that payment or remuneration is universally undermining community volunteering, whilst rhetorically tempting, does not stand up to scrutiny as the terms require significant contextualisation as they shift and move within and between contexts. Our research does indeed indicate that in some contexts paying volunteers may be significantly disrupting established concepts of volunteering. However many of the core concepts relating volunteering and remuneration are slippery and contested, flowing into each other in ways that demand attention to the different investments and relationships that shape volunteering in developing countries, and show the need for caution about broad critiques of ‘paid’ volunteering as undermining ‘pure volunteering’ (Sunkutu and Nampanya-Serpell, 2009).

Beyond remuneration? Building employment and livelihood opportunities

A great many people we are working with are experiencing significant and often crippling poverty. Unless we are able to develop practical measures to support marginalised individuals, they will continue to be under-represented in our volunteering base. ‘Payment’ may be one way to do this, but as we have shown, it has wider and complex implications that can work against inclusive approaches in ways that diminish the control of volunteering using organisations to shape volunteering practices beyond project delivery. As was highlighted in the IFRC Urban Volunteering Study (IFRC 2014):

“More extensive support for the livelihoods of volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds would promote greater diversity by encouraging socio-economically disadvantaged groups to participate. In this regard, National Societies that are serious about building opportunities for the vulnerable to volunteer should explore simple and practical options to support volunteers’ livelihood and employability.”



A number of National Societies in the Red Cross Red Crescent are doing this already, providing access to vocational training, exposure to work and leadership opportunities that will enhance the volunteer's CV and promote connections and networking. Others were developing formal partnerships to provide opportunities for their volunteers. These then offer incentives that are on a continuum with remuneration and even 'payment', and may indeed be more costly for organisations. But they may also be more supportive both in terms of enhancing local capacity and promoting the sustainability of volunteering.

"The economic challenges, migration of young population into other EU states, early employment for the youth, leave no space for volunteering activities. (Our National Society) is actively working with educational institutions and employment centres as to give opportunities to the volunteers to gain experience and at the same time to benefit from their volunteering services." (Manager - East European National Society)

Some National Societies attempt to provide other professionally related 'in-kind' incentives or support that go beyond exposure to the work experiences and training opportunities that are normally afforded through volunteering. One Latin American National Society supports volunteers in finding scholarships in colleges to start or finish their studies. Another in Africa worked with the government health department to try and find employment for their trained and more-established volunteers.

In the GRoV, volunteering did appear to be more popular in countries where the government, educational institutions and the private sector valued volunteering experience as useful contributions to their professional development. If participation in volunteering can be seen to increase an individual's chances during challenging economic times it was more attractive, as noted by others (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011):

"Volunteering is seen as an opportunity for internal and external scholarships, for jobs and for college applications so, it becomes more and more popular among young people."
(staff member - East European NS)

But in other regions where volunteering was perceived to not be valued as useful for employment or educational considerations, it did not act as an incentive;

"Yes, this can be seen in Europe but here, very few firms such as universities or colleges require CVs showing experience in volunteering. We do receive those people, and give them an activity. This is recently noted, only around 20 to 25 per cent of volunteers are joining for such a purpose." (Manager - Persian Gulf National Society)

Some National Societies have developed interesting livelihoods approaches to volunteering such as one in central Africa that is helping to secure communal land in a community and supports volunteers to work on the land. A portion of the profits goes to a central fund that a committee of local representatives decides how to spend to serve the community and those who are particularly disadvantaged. But another portion of the profits also goes to the volunteers, who also receive other benefits such as access to goats for breeding. This approach aligns with the strong tradition of mutual support held in the country and serves to strengthen this tradition rather than undermining it. In this case it has been phenomenally successful, with many hundreds of thousands of volunteers rallying to join the initiative.

"There is also this trend, and another voluntary trend, where young people get together perhaps around a productive activity, agricultural, fishing and everything, and benefit from support from certain donors, so that the activity becomes an economic activity looked after by themselves. There are also voluntary bodies that supply credit to groups and individuals, people can be identified and benefit from this service. Until now, the trend has been that young people are continuing to leave the countryside for the large urban centres, where they look for work. So the trend for the next ten years, if economically it is not reversed, this trend will still be there and the work for us would be, economically speaking, to see how we can manage this by creating production units of the National Society." (Central African NS)

This again highlights the importance of exploring incentives and remuneration in the wider context within which the volunteering is taking place. It is also important to remember that such livelihoods approaches do not sidestep issues of inequality and inclusion and care and vigilance is needed to ensure opportunities for participation are not designed in ways that exclude the volunteers who would also be marginalised by some of the 'payment' practices detailed above.

Conclusion

What the data reveal are the complex and challenging ways paying volunteers is playing out across NSs, and the ways it connects with wider pressures faced by National Societies as well as individuals and communities. There is

an urgent need for further research to fully capture the different ways this dynamic plays out in the context of diverse understandings of volunteering, and also the shifting presence and activities of aid and development actors in particular countries. Although there are more straightforward ways in which payment could be said to change what is meant by volunteering, the ways it comes together with other pressures and contexts means some unexpected and often hidden changes need to be understood at both organisational and sectoral levels.

What our research shows is that remuneration has become part of the repertoire of aid and development actors as they use volunteers as a form of reserve army of labour that is professional, flexible, disposable and proximate. There are reliable indications that aid and development can come together with volunteer remuneration to work against inclusive and universal readings of volunteering and its role in development, instead creating volunteering economies that are increasingly hierarchical. At the same time, it can also be critical to enabling the participation of some groups of volunteers. Rather than suggest a need to be more rigid in what counts as volunteering, a key starting point must be more intelligent conversations between the different actors hosting, using and supporting volunteers engaged in development. Such conversations are essential to ensure greater sensitivity to the complex and often-unintended effects that volunteer remuneration can have.



Chapter 4

Volunteering in Conflict and Crises

This chapter explores the experiences of supporting volunteers in conflict and crises, settings in which there are increasing numbers of volunteers in the global South. It argues that volunteers are increasingly significant given the withdrawal of international humanitarian actors from certain conflict zones and the destruction of local infrastructures. These volunteers need far more support but there is a need for further research to understand their needs and experiences.

“In 2012, I was in charge of the medical point in Al Moadamiya. I suffered several injuries during my field missions: one shrapnel wound in the wrist and three others in the chest. In another mission, I was shot by a sniper in the upper arm; some of that shrapnel is still in my body now. I suspended my work in the first-aid department for a while, and then I returned to the training department. Now I am returning to the first-aid department.” (Volunteer Syria) (IFRC 2014b)

“We were waiting outside this building but the forces wouldn’t let us go inside. We were eager to get in there because we knew there were bodies [of people who] had been killed by the forces and we wanted to get them out and return them to their families. Finally, after a few days, they let us go in and we saw that the bodies they were people we knew. Some of them were my friends, but we couldn’t let on or we might have gotten shot as well. Also, because of who we are, we have to try to be neutral, so we just kept quiet and started removing them. The guards were saying ‘just leave them in the streets and let the dogs eat them’. We had to just keep quiet. Finally, when we were away, I just broke down. I was crying, like, man, so much. I couldn’t go back to volunteer for a couple of days. It happens like that sometimes. One day, the volunteer just won’t turn up anymore and when we go and see him, we find out that he just couldn’t take it anymore and he stops coming. Most of the volunteers, they have seen too much. No one in their life should see those things, not ever in their life. But I have carried decapitated bodies, heads. I have seen decomposing bodies, lost someone during CPR, got shot at while trying to put out a fire. Too much of it all.” (Volunteer, Middle East)

“I am not sure if I will stay in this team or not...but one day I will remember these emotional events. I will not forget the looks of gratitude and admiration directed toward us. I will not forget a single day that there were volunteers who pledged their lives to save a life.” (Volunteer, Syria) (IFRC 2014c)

An increasing reality for Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers is that they operate within highly fragile situations, complex emergencies or within protracted conflicts. Today, around the world, more than 1 million Red Cross Red

Crescent volunteers are operating in countries where there are situations of conflict. This reflects a broader pattern: 80 per cent of humanitarian aid is being spent in countries where there is some sort of conflict (Amos 2015). Natural disasters such as tropical storms, droughts and wildfires are increasing in frequency and severity; many times these events occur in situations of conflict or chronic violence. This and other large-scale emergencies such as outbreaks of deadly diseases require mass mobilisation of local volunteers within risky environments. The scale of humanitarian need around the world is expanding, emerging from environments that are so dangerous and highly complex that few organisations can act within them.

The stories that volunteers in these situations tell offer an excellent example of local resilience and solidarity in the face of conflict and crisis, of mobilising in the face of great risk and of taking up the reins within their own communities when most others cannot, or will not. As large numbers of volunteers work in highly complex and extraordinarily dangerous environments, where they witness and address large-scale, significant human need, greater attention must be paid to the critical roles they play, and the short and long-term risks they face. This is important not only for humanitarian and programming reasons, but because these experiences also have implications for how volunteering is defined understood at a macro level. Additional focus on the contribution of these volunteers also raises questions about the degree to which established scholarship and thinking is as comprehensive or universal as is sometime implied.

While there has been considerable research and writings about conflict settings, major emergency responses and other complex environments (e.g. see contributions to WDR 2015) little attention has been given to the needs, experiences, lessons and practices of volunteering in these situations. This, despite their prevalence and despite the fact that many of these large-scale crises would significantly worsen without their involvement. This review therefore seeks to shed light on some of the particular risks faced by humanitarian volunteers in these contexts. Some of these risks include facing stigma and the potential of attack from the communities they are operating within, lacking access to all of the equipment and training they need, managing challenges in community acceptance and accessing affected populations, psychological distress and inadequate insurance and other 'safety-nets'.

The value of local humanitarian volunteers in crises

It is not unusual, particularly within protracted conflicts and crises, for local infrastructure and government services to dissipate or break down completely, exacerbating the already disastrous situations many of the population are facing (WDR 2015). In many countries, Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers (along with those from local NGOs and faith groups) are among the very few remaining formal structures providing aid, medical care and other services.

"In the early days of Ebola, we couldn't get help, no-one else would do it. Local volunteers were the only ones putting their hands up. But even they at the start didn't want to do it. We lost a lot of volunteers, particularly when we went into burying bodies. A lot [of volunteers] didn't want to be part of that. But there were a lot too who said, 'no-one else will do this, it has to be us, this is our community.'" (RC aid worker)

“Well we normally have about 400,000 volunteers. But since the riots and conflict has erupted, people are scared that it will become a civil war and they are fleeing and taking their whole families with them. It is still ok in some of the rural areas but in many of the difficult areas, such as the capital, tens of thousands of our volunteers are gone. But there are huge needs in the population and we are all working as hard as we can to meet them. The remaining volunteers are still treating injured people and looking after the homes of their neighbours who have fled.” (Central African NS)

“In the Central African Republic, over a small period of time when the violence escalated, we saw the number of international malaria actors go from 42 to just 3 or 4. When the conflict was at its height, you only saw the UN, the rebels and Red Cross volunteers on the streets.” (RC Aid worker)

The role of local volunteers within these complex environments has been steadily increasing in recent years, in part driven by the inability of international aid actors to operate in these contexts and to reach people in the most need (WDR 2015 p.11). At the same time, there is often a marked increase in local actors, most of whom engage volunteers and who often continue to operate throughout the crisis.

In the Central African Republic (CAR), where conflict has raged and retreated in cycles for decades, there has been an almost complete breakdown of public services. International agencies struggle to operate throughout the country and to access some of the most disadvantaged. There is great risk in travelling to many areas and the conflict is so unpredictable it can be hard to read, erupting seemingly spontaneously and then subsiding just as quickly. Alliances change constantly and many of the social networks are being undone or damaged.

“Health centres out in the [outlying] regions have been abandoned long ago by the staff there. The government can’t do anything, so our volunteers from the local areas, they have just taken over. They have occupied the hospitals and are providing care to the people. Some of them are nurses, some of them just first aiders, but they are doing what they can. We deliver medical supplies when we can and do training.” (Staff member, Central African NS)

The scale of need in many of these locations is ‘far outstripping the ability of the world to fund the need’ (Amos 2015). In most instances, this means there is a greater reliance on mass volunteer groups, drawn from local populations who are committed, proximate and capable.

Local volunteers can sometimes enjoy much greater access to populations and in some cases, greater trust. Where international organisations may be painted as affluent outsiders not fully committed to the local population, or perhaps not as consultative, local volunteers are part of the community and are suffering the same woes as those they seek to assist. They have a well-developed understanding of the people, the social and cultural norms and are connected into local knowledge networks, which means they can easily grasp the intricate dynamics of the crisis and are well informed on new developments and shifts in the context. Local volunteers, therefore, can often play strong roles in building social and cultural capital and helping to form trust in the communities again.

A particularly unique feature of these locally driven responses are the scale at which they can operate. Local volunteer groups, particularly those from the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies can often number in the tens of thousands and are generally spread out across most parts of the country, maintaining a large infrastructure and network where most others have eroded.

Consider, for example, some of the responses that the Red Cross and Red Crescent has been involved in recently;

- In DRC, volunteers helped protect more than 2 million people from polio during 2013 and 2014
- In Syria, more than 9 million people were helped by volunteers from the Syrian Arab Red Crescent during just three months (July, August and September) in 2014
- 3.2 million people were reached in Ebola-affected countries by volunteers in 2013 and 2014

“Scale is a major thing. We have large numbers of them (local volunteers) operating all over the country. Because of their local knowledge and their training, they know where and how to get things done quickly. We need this in operations this complex. For example, they know where the wells are, how to find petrol, etc. It can work the other way, for example, it took some time to dispel the notion that Ebola was witchcraft. You had to work to break down some of these local misconceptions, but overall we would be lost without these local networks.” (Aid worker ebola affected countries)

While local volunteers can bring significant benefits to understanding and navigating the local environment, there is also a risk since they are from within the affected communities. As such, they have local affiliations (belonging to a particular ethnic or religious group, etc.) that they can be seen as connected to one side or another. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement invests a considerable amount of energy in positioning itself to act as a neutral and impartial organisation, serving people in need regardless of their political or religious affiliation. Significant training and support is provided for its volunteers and decision-makers while public-education campaigns are undertaken to build awareness of the organisation's neutrality. Nonetheless, local volunteers, rightly or wrongly, can sometimes be seen as partisan (WDR 2015 p.12). This places a considerable burden on the volunteers to conduct themselves personally in a manner consistent with the Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. For this reason, much more can and needs to be done by governments and humanitarian organisations to ensure that local humanitarian volunteers are respected by all as neutral providers of relief during times of crisis.

Ensuring training for complex demands

The increased reliance on local volunteer groups means they are often being asked to perform much larger and more complex and technically skilled roles than in the past. In Syria, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent provides the ambulance service for most of the country. Volunteers who staff the ambulances are, on almost daily basis, providing advanced medical care to patients who have been exposed to conflict-related injuries; in Yemen, volunteers provide maternal and child health care in areas cut off or besieged by conflict; and in Ebola-affected countries, volunteers conducted safe and dignified burials, maintaining extraordinary infection-control procedures even as they provide some semblance of peace of mind to their communities.

The skills required to perform these roles are significant under 'normal' circumstances. To perform them within these environments requires even greater capacity. A significant amount of training and support is required to help

prepare and support these volunteers. Many volunteers will perform a variety of functions on any given day, conducting assessments, distributing aid, delivering health campaigns, vaccinations, primary medical care and evacuation, just to name a few. They do all this while operating within tight and extremely complex security-management frameworks, where on a regular basis they may have to negotiate with local power structures, combatant groups or other gatekeepers simply to gain access to communities in dire need (WDR 2015 p. 7).

“We do many things: repairing the main water line that supplies the whole city, evacuating dead bodies, repairing water and electricity lines, transporting medication and vaccines to the needy throughout the governorate, exchanging processes between parties to the conflict, and bringing flour to Aleppo when the roads were cut off.” (Volunteer, Syria) (IFRC 2014c).

Meanwhile, the reporting, accountability and monitoring requirements associated with such roles, and with the disbursement of international aid, have become more complex and demanding over time, according to many of those we interviewed. While such measures can improve accountability, performance and help build trust between local organisations and international donors, the requirements have placed even greater burdens on the volunteer role. Volunteers need to develop specialised skills to manage these accounting mechanisms and more of their time is spent meeting the expectations, policies and procedures imposed by external donors or their own organization’s hierarchy.

As significant amounts of relief provided by the large global institutions goes through local volunteer groups, volunteers are often being asked to deliver more support than their capacity may allow. These demands are being made of individuals who have often personally experienced considerable trauma already and live in a day-to-day context of extreme stress and risk. In these situations, therefore, the job description of a typical volunteer has become increasingly complex. More time and resources must therefore be invested into preparing, training and supporting these volunteers; project managers must be cognisant of this reality while project plans, and budgets must take the need for training and other volunteer supports into account from the onset of any emergency response.

Safety and security of volunteers

The environments that humanitarian volunteers operate within are as complex as they are unstable, and a common feature of them is the sheer pace at which they change.

“There are regular outbreaks of violence. One suburb can be peaceful one day and then can erupt the next. Many different factions may emerge and subside from day to day, week to week. Power shifts are constantly changing, even in the capital. The conflict is so localised that even suburbs can change quickly. Over the last 2-3 years, the violence has been consistent.” (Central African Republic)

“The environment was complex. Things were changing so rapidly and regularly that we couldn’t tell where the next set of problems were coming from. Ebola spread quickly across three countries and at the start we were always a step behind it. And then suddenly you could have other problems burst out that complicated it all even further.” (Aid worker, Ebola response)



In environments such as these, access to reliable on-the-ground information provided from local actors is not only critical but life-saving. The cost for the individual volunteers however, has been unacceptably high; in the first 10 months of 2015, 20 Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers lost their lives in the performance of their duties. The significant change in this has been in the cause of these volunteer deaths. While in the years leading up to 2013, 60 per cent of these deaths came as a result of natural disasters, in the two subsequent years, 80 per cent of volunteer deaths were as a result of conflict-related incidents such as explosions and gunfire. In addition to fatalities, many others have been injured, detained, or assaulted. Thousands have been exposed to such dramatic levels of suffering that they may never fully recover from the psychological stress.

The Sierra Leonean Red Cross, for example, deployed 55 teams to perform safe and dignified burials for people who perished from Ebola. This is both a critical role and a highly dangerous one as the virus is highly infectious once the carrier has died. The volunteers were stretched, working 12-hour days often seven days a week. The work itself is both physically and psychologically exhausting. Compounding this, most of the volunteers have experienced significant stigma from their own communities; their families may not let them live with them, hotels will not rent them rooms (the Red Cross has had to rent specific houses to accommodate these volunteers) and anguished communities even lashed out at them physically. In Guinea, for instance, an average of 10 attacks per month occurred on Red Cross volunteers responding to the Ebola crisis at the peak of the epidemic.

“One mother was so afraid that her sons had joined the burial teams (for Ebola) that she brought false accusations up against them with the police, so that the police would lock them up. She was scared, everyone was scared”. (Aid worker, Ebola-affected country)

Although data relevant to the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers is available more readily, more efforts are needed for the collection and consolidation of data at national level, including disseminating information about volunteers. At the local level, this is critical to their safety, and much can be achieved by local authorities and others in conducting promotional and educational activities with communities to help them understand the role of local volunteers. This can help engender an environment that is more supportive and enabling for local volunteers.

While local volunteers do have strong networks within their countries, there must also be caution in the frequent assumption that local volunteers are safer in these environments than international actors. This is an assumption that does not hold true. In fact, even among paid aid workers, the majority of those targeted are local staff (IRIN 2015). In order to better equip them to face these challenges, further efforts to disseminate the humanitarian principles and thus build the volunteers' acceptance within communities is required from all stakeholders.

Safety of access in humanitarian issues and acceptance by the community is a critical issue to ensure that volunteers can effectively undertake their work. The work of the volunteers is highly complex and involves often sophisticated navigation within dangerous contexts. All too often volunteers face considerable stigma and opposition in these efforts.

As for me what makes me unhappy, one day there was an attack .. when we arrived the people of the neighbourhood gathered us, searched us, took our phones and wallets and sometimes they even hit us, that makes me unhappy. One day we were driving through a zone and (someone) went to throw a grenade inside our vehicle. Fortunately one of the men he was with took it from him... why do that to us? We are here to help them. Why do they treat us this way? (Volunteer Central Africa)

There is much that could be achieved in promoting volunteer safety through coordinated efforts between organisations, governments and other actors in helping to promote the role of humanitarian volunteers during these responses;

"The executives in our National Society must work together with the government in order to initiate a campaign of awareness, so that people understand the necessity of the [Red Cross and Red Crescent]. And for those who aren't volunteers, teach them what the emblem is ... People must know that the goal of the mission is save lives, to save humanity. We need a campaign of awareness from the government." (Volunteer, Central African NS)

During the most recent conflict in the Central African Republic, volunteers lived in the Red Cross offices to protect their safety. They worked long shifts for many continuous days. Some were killed or attacked while delivering aid. One volunteer was even followed home after an argument about aid distribution at a camp and killed in his house. These issues are not confined to a few countries, they are happening in multiple locations across the world in different forms. Attacks against both humanitarian staff and volunteers have increased significantly in recent years. In 2013 alone, there was a 66 per cent increase worldwide. In 2000, there were 41 significant attacks on aid workers recorded across the globe. By 2014, it had risen to 190. In those 15 years, over 3,000 aid workers have been killed, injured or kidnapped (IRIN 2015), a significant portion of which have been local volunteers. It should be noted that these figures are obtained from data sources that have been made public (for example through press releases) and are likely to be an under estimation. More research and investment in data collection is required to fully understand the scope of the problem.

“We do a lot of work in IDP camps and other unsecure environments and it creates problems for the volunteers. [For example], there are security problems everywhere. We have bomb blasts, terrorists activities in different part of the country. Some of the volunteers from different [international] organisations and a few of the local organisations, they got killed. In addition, there are some kidnapping cases and some other cases that made it difficult for organisations to work in the communities. So, for us, security is one of the main problems we are facing.” (South Asian NS)

“Yes, we had incidents in the volunteers’ home. Some of our volunteers were threatened. This happens in conflict areas, volunteers are threatened by negative groups. Some volunteers were also injured by crossfire in these provinces. Besides that, we have car accidents and also disease. Yes, volunteers get sick. (Central African NS)

“Volunteers are always at the front-line in critical and dangerous places, so the volunteer becomes more susceptible to danger threatening his life. The most common accidents include injuries during the fights in battle. In addition, some volunteers were detained. I was detained for 18 months during my work as a paramedic providing emergency medical services. There are volunteers who are still detained and we lost 17 volunteers who were killed. However, these accidents do not discourage volunteers, and they would provide their moral, humanitarian and religious duties toward the people.” (Middle Eastern NS)

“What also makes us unhappy is to be targeted. The killings. When volunteers are on the ground and wearing the vest (displaying the Red Cross emblem) and they get shot at, or they get killed. It shouldn’t be this way.” (Volunteer, Central African NS)

Disconcertingly, many of the volunteers responding to these humanitarian crises remain uninsured despite the significant risks they face. More could be done to ensure that volunteers are either insured or that they and their families can access other safety nets in the event that the volunteers are injured or killed. In Colombia, for instance, there is legislation that requires all volunteers participating in disaster response teams to be insured. Recognition from donors of the need to allocate greater portions of humanitarian response budgets to supporting volunteer safety and wellbeing — along with investment in community acceptance initiatives — is desperately needed.

Psychological Support

It is important to remember that because the volunteers responding to these crises are almost entirely made up from local populations, they are usually managing significant personal trauma themselves. Of the 60 volunteers surveyed in CAR, almost 40 per cent were widows due to the conflict (Tanaka et al 2015). On top of managing these traumas, the volunteers are signing up to undertake work that exposes them to further trauma and even stigma from their communities.

“Our volunteers go out on a daily basis and are collecting bodies to return them to their families. In the last 18 months, they have retrieved over 1,000 bodies. It is not unusual for a volunteer to retrieve the body of someone they grew up with or went to school with. This goes on constantly.” (Aid worker, Central African NS)

“Sometimes when we are wearing our vest they call us names, ‘bottom feeder’, ‘corpse eater’... it makes us unhappy.” (Volunteer, Central African NS)

The collection and return of deceased people to their loved ones is a function performed in many countries by Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers. This helps bring some degree of comfort to loved ones, but it does exact a toll on the volunteers who took part, as do the many other tasks performed under these conditions.

“I see them drinking a lot in the evenings when their shift is over, I think this is one of the ways they are trying to cope.” (West African NS)

“One of the first things they told me when I arrived is that they need psychological help. I had never seen this before, never seen volunteers ask outright for this support. I knew then things were really bad.” (Aid worker, Central Africa)

“In a way, it was unlike any other crisis response I had seen. Every moment could be dangerous. Even being at home in the shared house, anyone could be infected. There was a constant level of anxiety and stress.” (Volunteer, Ebola-affected Country)

What is perhaps most confronting is that there is some evidence to suggest that the stress and trauma that these volunteers are being exposed to in this work is impacting them in more severe ways than some of their paid staff counterparts. There is once again little formal investigation into these matters, but there is some evidence to suggest that volunteers in complex emergencies have at least similar or even higher complaint levels of mental health issues than paid staff. According to one researcher, between 24 and 46 per cent of volunteers in some post-disaster contexts were reported to be at risk of developing a PTSD disorder (Thomar 2015). Despite the evidence of high rates of PTSD in disaster responders, there is a dearth of knowledge on the mental health of volunteers and humanitarian aid staff in post-disaster settings, with only one longitudinal study carried out with a large sample of disaster volunteers (Thomar et al 2014) and a recent cohort study looking into the mental health impact of delegate work (Cardozo et al 2012). The authors of this study are unaware of any such study on volunteers in conflict situations. This is a stunning gap that urgently requires more detailed and thorough study.

“I still have trouble sleeping. Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and I can see the corpses. I can see me running over them trying to find ones alive, to provide first aid to [them].” (Volunteer, Central African NS)

It is clear that these local volunteers will benefit from substantial psychological support within these contexts including a well-developed plan for after-care once the crisis has abated.

Factors such as support from the team leader, access to adequate equipment and training, the types of roles being undertaken by the volunteers (for example providing PSS to affected community members) and length of working hours, have been cited as having particular impact on the mental health of volunteers. This then means that there is much that can be achieved by organisations and donors responding to disasters, conflict situations and protracted crises that will contribute to improved outcomes for volunteers. This includes comparatively simple measures such as ensuring there is adequate funding available for equipment, or fostering a sense among volunteers that their organization cares for their well being.

“During the conflict, we went to pick up bodies. Can you imagine a corpse was left in the sun for several days? They were totally decomposed. We don’t have access to boots. For the smell, a scarf is not enough. We should have proper clothes,” (Volunteer, Central Africa)

“(The National Society) taking care of me is important. I was in an ambulance [and] there was fighting all around and lots of shooting and the driver was erratic and he crashed the ambulance. It rolled two times. I ended up in the hospital, but I was taken care of, so I will go again. I won’t give 100 per cent if they aren’t looking after me. I probably wouldn’t stop but they wouldn’t get 100 per cent from me anymore. Getting support is important, either from the people or from the National Society. We need equipment, tools, materials, team support, comradeship, support. If I go to manage dead bodies I need the equipment and the training for it. If I don’t hear encouragement from the National Society leaders ... even a little amount changes things.” (Volunteer, North Africa)

Motivations: why do they do it?

Many of the staff members supporting these volunteers have reflected on the high levels of commitment displayed by the volunteers in these situations. The severity of the issues being faced by the populations seems to drive a deep passion for trying to help their fellow human beings, often while ‘paid worker’ services were breaking down. Indeed, for many of the volunteers surveyed, it was witnessing the Red Cross’ work in trying to alleviate this suffering that became a motivator to join. These comments come from volunteers in a variety of conflict situations.

“During the conflict, volunteers were everywhere and were circulating everywhere to do their work. What makes me happiest is that they were ready to help people, it made me happy to see that.”

“I see people dying just like that, little children hit by a stray bullet, blood everywhere. I said ‘ah all of this, what is it? This is Red Cross, I see women saving children and I said ah, I will also become a member of Red Cross

For some, as in the case of these volunteers from Central Africa, it was having a personal experience that was a catalyst for joining humanitarian action.

“Beforehand, I hated the Red Cross because of the culture, of our culture in which we don’t touch bodies. Sometimes at night, in dreams, I come to a cemetery, so it scares me to go to cemeteries. So there came a point [when] I lost one of my older brothers and I wasn’t even able to find the body. It’s thanks to the Red Cross who had a process to bring the body to the village, and what I saw made me totally proud, really. I saw volunteers all over the hospitals, working rescuing people, that’s what encouraged me. I said ‘no, I too could die tomorrow,’ so that made me sign up to the Red Cross.”

“It’s the volunteers whose job it is to pick up bodies ... In cases of accidents, you can see that blood is everywhere, but the volunteers are there to pick up the victims. I hated that, I said ‘no, this type of work I can’t do it.’ In other words, it has pushed me to hate volunteering. And secondly, everything they do, they did it for free. And I said ‘yes but with all that?! What’s it for?’ And I said, ‘no, I want to find a job.’ What made me change is that there was an accident in which my family were also the victims. During the accident, I was there but there was nothing I could do. And there were some volunteers who came and rescued my family. And then I became more conscientious, I said ‘no, what did I do? I didn’t bring any help?’ And I said to myself, ‘what these people are doing here, I can do.’”

In many cases, conventional drivers for motivation appear still present in these volunteers: a sense of achievement, self-esteem, access to personal and professional development opportunities and supportive management, etc. Even



if these break down or do not meet expectations, the fundamental human impulse to lend assistance to help ease extraordinary levels of suffering is what ensures their continued service. Volunteers in these contexts may not always feel satisfaction from their role, and they may not always feel they are supported by management or the communities, but many in our study expressed a deep commitment to the cause and a deep sense of obligation to the communities they were helping. These observations are based on small samples of qualitative interviews and much deeper and rigorous research is warranted¹¹. Still, there is little doubt that these forms of volunteering challenge established debate around how and why people volunteer.

¹¹ The IFRC is working with Swedish RC and the ICRC on a three year research project on volunteers in complex settings, but considerable more investment and focus on volunteering in these scenarios is warranted.

“Despite all the challenges, I never heard (the volunteers) complain, they know how important this work is. Even the competition between agencies seems to have been put aside, because we all know ... this is serious.” (Aid Worker, Ebola-affected country)

“When conflict broke out in the area, the area was completely cut off and all the services stopped. But the volunteers took over, providing what help they could, travelling through battle lines to bring relief to the people. They were very determined.” (Middle Eastern National Society)

“If we don’t do it who will?” (Volunteer, Ebola-affected country)

“We are motivated by the humanitarian needs, the good feeling of helping people and the respect and recognition we get for it from the people. We feel responsible. We have skills, [in] first aid [and] how to respond, give support and we have a duty. It’s not something light. We are rushing to help. We are the first ones there. There is a huge obligation.” (Volunteer, North African NS)

There is again a need for caution here. The commitment of the volunteers to the cause and to their communities coupled with their effectiveness and scale, can then make them vulnerable to being exploited as ‘cheap and proximate labour’ in highly dangerous settings where international aid workers cannot operate anyway. Care must be taken to ensure that the large cohorts of local volunteers are consulted and included in design and decision-making and not relegated solely to execution of tasks.

Listening to local actors

The volunteers who are involved in these operations are often among the poorest in the world. Sometimes, they are also the least formally educated and trained and with the least access to resources and support. Yet they are carrying out life-saving tasks under a shadow of unthinkable risk. Their local knowledge is critical in these complex environments, as they have better access to intelligence about changing local circumstances and need. But at times, the international response system that depends on them, is not listening well enough to what they have to say.

“[The volunteers] often know what is going on, not always, but they certainly know better than the foreigners. Like where the power is shifting hands or where there might be outbreaks of violence. But we don’t always listen to them very well. We are focussed on getting aid out to certain populations and perhaps sometimes they are not as likely to come forward and speak because, well, there is no money there you see. This is the only aid and money coming through, so they are sometimes hesitant to say ‘no’ in case it stops or slows down. Money rules everything here. But we have to find better ways to have their voices come in to the process.” (Aid worker, Central Africa)

In these instances where volunteers are mainly used as an available source of ready labour rather than active participants in responses, some of the tremendous advantages of supporting and mobilising local volunteers can be undone. The reality is that too often there is an uneven power relationship between these local volunteers and the donors and international agencies. The need for local partners during these crises has become more central in recent years. But their contribution must be based on genuine partnerships in which they have an equal footing rather than a position as sub-contractors who deliver services for money. International agencies must invest more in working

alongside these local agencies and in learning about the complex local power relationships, alliances and dynamics that these local organizations are operating within. They must also take a closer look at how their critical financial support can contribute to strengthening local community organisations and their volunteers.

Conclusion

Humanitarian need is likely to continue to outstrip the global capacity (or will) to fund the required response. Investment in volunteering is therefore one of the most pragmatic ways, or sometimes only available option, for responding to this need. It can simultaneously contribute to strengthening local communities, building organisational capacities and increasing the capacity for rapid and innovative humanitarian responses.

Greater efforts also need to be made to ensure that combatant groups and others involved in conflict understand their role and can ensure safer access. Just as there are local imperatives for ensuring people understand and respect the work of local volunteers, it is also significant internationally. Greater research and dissemination is needed to ensure that global actors understand and provide appropriate support for local volunteers, including engaging them in decision-making processes and providing protection and support that matches the protection and support received by paid staff or international aid workers.





CHEF D'INTERVENTION



Conclusion

Investment in volunteering is critical to sustainable development

The Global Review has built from the knowledge and insights of individuals shaping, enabling and promoting volunteering. It has highlighted the importance of understanding volunteering in particular contexts, and how this is connected to and increasingly interdependent with volunteering in other contexts, through processes such as migration and urbanisation, the activities of aid donors, and through systems of organisational decision making and programming.

Without more contextual understandings of volunteering, there is a risk of unhelpful and crude conceptualisations that are appealing in their simplicity, but unlikely to provide useful policy setting or conceptual purchase. There is a risk of volunteering being treated as a 'given' and 'free' rather than as a complex set of practices that are constantly changing and that can contest as well as reproduce inequality.

Volunteering can deliver remarkable benefits, but these will only be realized if there are connected policy commitments at local and global level that take into account some of the complexities, contradictions, inequalities and costs of volunteering.

This report has particularly focused on volunteering in the context of poverty and development, given the continued limited research on local volunteers and development. We conclude the report, therefore, by exploring the opportunities for volunteering and its contribution to development presented by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

"The emerging development agenda looks set to encompass a set of goals that are more complex, transformative, interdependent and universally applicable than the MDGs" (UNDP 2015). We suggest that the 17 ambitious goals of the SDGs will be impossible to achieve without the engagement of volunteers and indeed, volunteering features in the developing policy narratives of the goals. However, the goals also exemplify the challenges identified in this review of bringing together global prescriptions with local meaning and ownership. As with volunteering, the strategies and approaches to achieving the SDGs do not exist outside the structural inequalities they seek to address. We suggest three themes which provide useful lenses through which to examine the potential benefits and challenges associated with volunteering as a contribution to the SDGs:

Scale

Given volunteers' capacities to reach and build capacity within communities that are often hard to reach in other ways, and the presence of forms of volunteering all societies, volunteering will be critical to achieving the SDGs. It is hard to imagine, for instance, that Goal 1 of ending hunger and achieving food security, appropriate nutrition, and zero child stunting, can be achieved without many millions of volunteers supporting nutrition education programs and campaigns at community level, delivering food aid across vast countries where required, and supporting agriculture and livelihoods programs.

Likewise, if we are to ensure universal coverage of quality healthcare, including the prevention and treatment of communicable and non-communicable diseases, sexual and reproductive health, family planning, routine immunization and mental health, then local volunteer action will be critical. The acute shortage of qualified and resourced health workers documented elsewhere will not be fully redressed in the coming decades and as such, the mass mobilisation of volunteers will play an indispensable role in striving to achieve these goals.

The Red Cross and Red Crescent network supports up to 17 million volunteers globally each year, more than 13 million of which live and work in developing or middle-income countries. The reach that these volunteers can attain is without match. It is estimated that around the world, nearly seven million Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers are working on health related issues

It is worth noting also that 52 of the 189 Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies around the world each have more than 10,000 volunteers (21 of them have more than 50,000 volunteers). Thus, the scale at which they are operating – and the scale of the changes they can effect – are significant. In the Central African Republic, for instance, the National Society employs between 40 and 50 staff members while there are more than 12,000 volunteers participating nationwide. This is not just a matter of numerical scale; the volunteers stretch out across all areas of the country providing services where there is no salaried staff member present for many miles around.

While these numbers are impressive, they represent just a small piece of the overall picture of volunteers in the global South. Most international and local organisations engage with volunteers and many community volunteer groups self-organise, although the lack of reliable data on this activity means we lack an accurate picture of what is happening and are, hence, less able to effectively support such work or develop equal and productive links to wider policy setting and goals.

Identifying the importance of volunteers to addressing the scale of the SDGs is not the same as saying that a new army of volunteers is needed – the engagement and support of volunteers already within their own communities will need to be an essential part of the SDGs. This is not only about addressing scale, therefore, but also about the ownership and localisation of the SDGs.

Localisation

There has rightly been a strong focus on the need to ensure that local actors are at the heart of the SDG design and implementation. Securing sustainable and

meaningful development gains requires people's engagement and participation. In short, we need to focus on people-centered approaches and solutions in addition to the requisite focus on technical and financial means (VSO 2015).

Volunteering provides opportunities to achieve this that are highly effective and, if appropriately managed, can be empowering for those involved and deliver sustainable benefits. Development initiatives can have more legitimacy and currency with communities when local volunteers are engaged, offering the possibility of an effective means to ensure participatory development on a mass scale. As well as contributing to development goals through particular activities, participation as a volunteer in and of itself can support development, particularly through enhancing individual and community resilience and capacity by building social capital, supporting personal development, social cohesion and connectivity, and developing skills. The involvement of local volunteers can provide a tangible way for communities to have a say over the development initiatives impacting them, and in this way volunteering can promote accountability of both governments and institutions. Volunteers can be powerful advocates for their rights and for those of their communities, providing a voice for the marginalised and acting as brokers and bridges to their wider communities.

However, as the data from the GROV shows, we cannot assume that volunteering as such will necessarily make a positive contribution to the localising agenda; if volunteers are used as a form of cheap labour for service delivery, or volunteers from some communities are excluded or unable to participate, then volunteering will exacerbate some of the problems that the localising agenda seeks to address. Furthermore, the engagement of local volunteers in the context of conflict and crises cannot obviate the need for appropriate protection and support to ensure their safety. Taking the lessons from the GROV seriously, and listening to the voices of volunteer managers and volunteers on the ground, is critical to ensuring that volunteering contributes to this and the other priorities of the SDGs.

Cost

Volunteering can be seen as particularly cost effective in the context of the diverse and multiple benefits it can bring. But this is not the same as saying it is a cheap way to deliver aid and development services. The Review has revealed a paradox of growing reliance on, and celebration of, volunteers in the global South as delivering aid and development, requiring more skills and higher levels of support and training (and financial incentives), but simultaneous lack of recognition and appropriate training and support for those volunteers. It has also highlighted the emergence of volunteering economies and hierarchies, exacerbated by the growth of 'paid' volunteering and wider inequalities in remuneration shaped by the use of volunteers as flexible labour for the aid industry.

As this report has highlighted, many NSs can readily source funding to deliver projects that utilise volunteers; securing resources to invest in the development of volunteering strategies is far more challenging. These investments are critical; many of the issues that were highlighted as impacting retention such as problems of governance, inadequate command structure, ineffective communication systems and processes, failure to provide necessary equipment and failure to promote the safety and protection of volunteers can be improved. While it is clear that seismic external trends are shifting volunteering engagement patterns, there is still obviously much that could be achieved with greater

investment from donors and institutions in the development of organisational and national strategies to strengthen volunteerism.

So while volunteering can play a highly cost-effective contribution to the SDGs, it is not free. If this is not recognised by those seeking to implement and achieve the SDGs, they will fail in achieving the goals, not least by undermining local forms of action that can support inclusion, resilience and poverty reduction.

Recommendations

Lastly, we would like to reiterate some additional and equally important recommendations that we think will maximize further investment in volunteering, as well as the impact that volunteers can make.

The Review makes recommendations in four key areas:

Research and knowledge

Further research is urgently needed on the relationships between volunteering and development in global South settings. Research is particularly needed on the ways ideas of volunteering are being transformed and reinvented in the context of migration, urbanisation and aid funded volunteer remuneration. Such work needs to take seriously the voices of volunteers and volunteer managers, and to develop through co-productive partnerships with volunteer engaging organisations at local and global scale, academic institutions and wider development actors.

Policy, organizational and donor attention

Despite the significance of local volunteerism in developing countries to global development and humanitarian agendas, scant policy and donor attention is afforded to the needs of these volunteers. Investments need to be made into building enabling environments for volunteering to flourish and to address barriers to further and deepened engagement. Acknowledgement and support for the many millions of existing volunteers needs to be allocated, founded on a sound understanding of how these local cultures of volunteering manifest. Greater portions of budgets need to be applied to strategies that promote sustainable local volunteer engagement and a meaningful integration into the localisation of SDG priorities and work.

Local volunteers in conflict and crises

There is an urgent need to better understand and support the activities of local volunteers in conflict and crisis settings. Along with research on their roles and experiences, there is a need for local and global advocacy, which increases recognition of their work, helping to mobilise resources to ensure their safety, security and well-being during and after their time volunteering.

Volunteer remuneration

There is a need for urgent debate, informed by further research, on the ways different forms of remuneration of volunteering are shaping volunteering activity. Rather than call for harmonisation or legislation, we suggest a first step is an open debate involving volunteering-engaging organisations, aid and donor actors, governments and volunteer managers to explore impacts, and identify strategies to ameliorate its negative impacts. Ultimately this must lead to local and international volunteer involving organisations reflecting on and improving their practice with regards to how they approach volunteer remuneration in development and humanitarian contexts.

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The Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.

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