



13:30 – 15:00 Volunteering abroad and human development policy – Und & another moderating

K Turner specific: Share history information, policy regarding volunteering from VSO and the reason of why volunteering is considered to be one of the national strategies, also how volunteering contributing to country's human and social capital.

- ***Could you please give us an overview about your organisations volunteering programmes? (what the programme does, how many countries that your governments operates volunteer programmes, for how long and how many volunteers have served in country etc.)***
 - i) VSO is a development organisation that works through volunteers to contribute to sustainable development for the poorest and most marginalised.
 - ii) We work with over 500 local partners, across 25 countries in the areas of education, health, livelihoods and participation and governance.
 - iii) Since VSO was first set up in 1960 it has recruited and sent over 40,000 international volunteers, 1,197 national volunteers and provided training and mentoring to over 60,000 community based volunteers (Annual report 2013/14).
 - iv) VSO is not just supported by the UK government but works directly with governments in most of the countries where we have programmes. In many of these countries we have worked closely with these governments to contribute to the development of national infrastructure that supports volunteer activity in country.
 - v) In 2014/15 VSO had 970 international volunteers, 700 ICS UK volunteers, 960 national volunteers and 20,000 community volunteers engaged in its programmes.
 - vi) There were 80 corporate departures last year (40 – VSO Netherlands, 29 – VSO UK, 10 – Global Resourcing and 1 from VSO Bahaginan)
 - vii) Our volunteers are on placement from anything ranging from a few days (for our political volunteers) to two years.
 - viii) Volunteers range from 18yrs and upwards. In 2013 38% of VSO's international volunteers were over 45yrs.

- ***What is the rationale from the government to support the volunteer programmes especially overseas volunteers and what are the benefits from the programme?***
 - As VSO recruits volunteers from both the UK and other countries including, for example, Kenya and the Philippines, I will answer this question in two parts, speaking in relation to my own government in the UK and for those governments in the other countries where we work.

 - In the UK VSO recruits three types of volunteer. These are skilled professional volunteers, youth volunteers and corporate volunteers. In terms of the governments rationale for supporting these volunteer programmes I will give a couple of examples from our youth volunteering scheme and skills professional volunteers;
 - a) Youth volunteers; the youth volunteers recruited by VSO are funded by the UK government through a scheme called International Citizen Service (ICS) which



recruits 18-25yrs olds to undertake placements overseas with groups of national volunteers in that country for 3 months. The government's motivation for funding this scheme is two-fold. Firstly their intention is that through youth volunteering these volunteers will develop new technical and social skills such as team building and leadership that will help them to progress within the UK employment market on their return. The second intention is that the experience will strengthen volunteers' sense of active citizenship, both in terms of their connection to social concerns outside of the UK but also to social concerns within the UK and their own community.

- b) To give one example of the rationale for government support for skilled professional volunteers, the government's interest in this aspect of international volunteering is arguably less than youth, as these are already adults who climbed to a certain point on the employment ladder or have retired from employment. However, a good example is VSO's relationship with the Royal College of Nurses, one of the main training colleges in the UK responsible for training nurses to work within the National Health System. This relationship has been a long term one based on the college's recognition of the fact that they've seen how nurses who undertake a volunteer placement are often better nurses; for example, they are more confident and have a greater understanding of how to adapt their skills and experience within new and often difficult environments.
- For other VSO countries recruiting international and national volunteers the motivations are extremely similar. For example, on speaking to my colleagues in the Philippines who are here today, they informed me that for the Philippines government, volunteering has for a long time been recognised as a way to teach young people in particular the kinds of soft skills such as leadership and confidence in their own abilities, that will stand them in good stead in the workplace. To them volunteering is also a way of aiming to secure a future generation of active citizens who will take responsibility for the welfare of their communities and contribute to strengthening social cohesion.
 - ***In your view, how do you see volunteering links with human development and social capital? [in home country]***

I think as a volunteer, in order to be effective, you are often heavily reliant on building strong personal relationships with the communities in which you are living and working, as it is these relationships that help to build the trust and understanding that is necessary to successfully carry out your volunteering activities. In addition, no volunteer would ever say that they achieve what they do alone and the work they carry out is heavily reliant on the networks that they build whilst volunteering and these collective efforts that make change happen. Speaking from my own personal experience as a volunteer, both in the UK and overseas, I think these are skills – building and working through relationships and strengthening social capital – that stay with you and are certainly perhaps the most valuable skills that I have transferred into my future work and volunteering experiences. I think that most governments recognise this as a benefit of individuals' engagement in volunteering



and see that people's engagement in volunteering can help to strengthen social cohesion within communities at home.

- ***What is your most impressive volunteer story you would like to share? (sample of obvious case, how volunteering is contributing to volunteer's changes about social issues and social development)***

I don't know if it's the most impressive volunteer story but it's certainly the most personal. Before joining VSO as an employee I was a VSO volunteer in India where I volunteered for 2 years in Delhi as Advocacy Advisor for a local NGO that worked with visually impaired individuals. What I gained from the experience in terms of my own social development is difficult to put into words except that I try to describe it as thinking with my heart as well as my head. What I experienced in India was the raw passion and determination with which my colleagues and the CEO of the NGO I worked for would approach their work. This partly came from the fact that the cause to them was extremely personal, as many of my colleagues' vision was entirely or partially impaired, but it was also the NGO environment in India and my organisation in particular that allowed for and encouraged innovation and passion first, logic second. I learnt something I'd perhaps forgotten when working in advocacy in the UK which is that passion and commitment is always where the best ideas should start and that good advocacy has to be driven by this passion for change and see that there is no 'one way' that things have to be. In the UK I think we've become too bogged down at times by thinking there is a 'certain way' of doing things and don't like to think outside of the box.

In terms of how my experience shaped my understanding of social issues. I think the most striking thing that also resonated with my experience of the disability sector in the UK was that often those who are the most marginalised are the last to have their voices heard, yet they are the ones with the solutions. My experience in India taught me about the challenges of genuine participation over consultation and how easy it is, even when you think that you are listening and being participatory, to still make assumptions about what others need.

- ***Your last thought about Thailand's volunteering environment***

Reflecting as an outsider on what I've picked up on over the last day and a half about Thailand's volunteering environment, I've been so impressed by what I've learnt. There is one thing that particularly stuck with me that a Professor from Tamasad University mentioned. He said that we need to change the way that we admit students to university and not base it solely on their academic credentials but also on their values and demonstration of volunteerism. I thought this was really interesting particularly as it's what we've been saying about the types of volunteers that we as VSO recruit and that we must be recruiting them based on the qualities that we have seen to be so important to volunteering such as strong interpersonal skills and a concern for others and not solely recruiting them based on their technical skills and experience. I suppose my question when thinking about this further would be then how to encourage others to recognise the value in these skills, thinking in particular of donors or governments supporting volunteering schemes and academic institutions. For example, I know that in the UK there is a lot of pressure on



academic institutions to focus on their academic credentials in order to receive high ratings, so whilst they might support schemes such as the one Tamasad has in place I don't know whether they would be willing to put such a thing into practice.