

THE STATE OF YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN AFRICA

Stepping back so that young people can step forward

a discussion paper for the 2011 IVCO conference



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FORUM INTERNATIONAL DU VOLONTARIAT POUR LE DÉVELOPPEMENT

Foreword

This is the seventh in a series of discussion papers produced by the International FORUM on Development Service (FORUM), which follows on from our research work on trends in international volunteering and co-operation in recent years. One of the key trends identified in this time has been how changing patterns of State funding affects us as International Volunteer and Co-operation Organisations (IVCOs).

This paper aims to consider some of the implications of changing patterns of State funding, what we can learn from this and identify some challenges for the future.

The views expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of FORUM or its members/ Associate members or of the organisations for whom the authors works. The responsibility for these views rests with the authors alone.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Dimity Fifer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dimity Fifer
Chair of FORUM

About FORUM

The International FORUM on Development Service (known as “FORUM”) is the most significant global network of International Volunteer Co-operation Organisations. FORUM aims to share information, develop good practice and enhance co-operation and support between its members/Associate members.

Together, FORUM members/Associate members explore innovative practice and research key contemporary issues, focusing on organisational learning and improved practice. This information is shared in person, at conferences and via the website.

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Summary

Youth volunteering in Africa is growing in scale, diversity, relevance and demand. International youth volunteering whether promoting North-South, South-South, and South-North exchange for young people continues to play an active part in development in Africa. However, as volunteering approaches grow in scale, and the demand for governments, private sector and development actors to respond to the needs of young people and societies within Africa intensifies, the challenge to volunteering organisations includes:

- Ensuring programs are shaped by the needs and interests of diverse young people in Africa
- Ensuring authenticity to the values of volunteerism by those utilising volunteering approaches
- Proving that youth volunteering in Africa makes a difference to local, national and global development goals (through quality programmes and credible evidence)
- Ensuring international programs complement and foster national and community volunteering approaches which offer cost effective and sustainable solutions to a country
- Creating space for young people to lead and shape the volunteering agenda in Africa

This paper will explore and raise questions for discussion as to why the challenges above need to be addressed in order to ensure volunteering programs in Africa are relevant and effective.

It will argue that youth volunteering in Africa is relevant to young people's needs and interests, but needs to better demonstrate how it can be connected to the achievement of important national and international development priorities; and show the distinct advantage of the youth volunteering approach against other development models which target youth.

It will further argue that international and institutional volunteering organisations need to take a step back and re-contextualise their role to focus more on fostering an enabling environment for youth-led, youth-driven volunteering approaches, so that we're planning for the future. Where international and institutional volunteering organisations can add specific value today is in providing expertise and support to: benchmark youth volunteering programs in Africa; generate credible research and evaluation of youth volunteering programs in Africa to demonstrate the contributions made to development goals and for building skilled labour forces in developing countries in Africa; and advocacy and policy influencing work to strengthen accreditation of 'quality' volunteering schemes and accountability for promoting volunteerism which promotes active citizenship of young people as agents of change in the world.

1. Does size really count?

Today there are approximately 1.2 billion young people (aged 15-24¹) living in the world². Representing around 18% of the global population this makes it the largest generation in history. It is estimated that the youth population of Africa stands at 160 million youths, which is 20% of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa. With 43% of sub-Saharan Africa under the age of 15 or equivalent to 360 million people, we're heading towards a further rise in the youth bulge in Africa, assisted by higher fertility rates and improvements in child survival.

So why does size matter?

Most countries in Africa are projected to have more working-age adults per child in 2030 than they did in 2006³. At the same time, family sizes are reducing. While many look upon the youth bulge as a potential risk to society, there are a number of opportunities that could result if current development trends continue and are pushed further. For example, a large workforce with fewer children to support creates an opportunity to save money on health care and other social services; improve the quality of education; increase economic output because of more people working; invest more in technology and skills to strengthen the economy; and create the wealth needed to cope with the future aging of the population⁴. This is often referred to as the “demographic dividend”⁵.

The question for us is are we working effectively with governments, civil society, communities and the private sector to create an enabling environment for this to potential benefit to be harnessed? And, whose interests are we pushing? Are they the interests of young people, our interests, or some other stakeholder (donor, government, private sector)?

¹Most common definitions of youth used by the United Nations and World Bank defines youth as aged between 15-24, however this age range varies at a national level and in particular in developing countries

² UN (2010) *International Year of Youth: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding* UN: New York

³ Ashford, L. (2007) *Africa's Youthful Population: Risk or Opportunity?*, Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau

⁴ Ashford, L. (2007), as above

⁵ Ashford, L. (2007), as above

2. What are the needs and interests of young people to volunteer in Africa?

Does international development and international volunteering need to be less mature in order to appeal and to be truly driven by a youth agenda?

Step one is stepping back. Remembering what it was to be a young person – what did you want? What did you hope to achieve? What did you feel passionately about? Looking at what your organisation does and how it does it – would it appeal to and satisfy a driven, passionate and energetic young person. Does it create space for young people to be heard and participate, or is that passion and energy likely to be lost amidst the professional running and decision making of the organisation?

Step two is talking to young people, and creating the space for their needs and interests to be taken on.

The International Citizen Service (ICS) is a global volunteering experience launched in 2011 by the UK government and funded by the Department for International Development (DfID). It aims to support young people from a range of backgrounds in the UK to participate in development in some of the poorest countries in the world through volunteering.

Following a review of applications and feedback at selection day events run by Restless Development's International Program in the UK for the ICS programme three common themes came up repeatedly from respondents regarding their motivations for volunteering:

- A desire to make a difference in the world
- A recognition that a placement would help personal development and future career progression
- A chance to have an experience that would not have been available otherwise (relating to subsidised places)

In Tanzania, 59 community and national youth volunteers currently placed in rural communities within Restless Development's peer to peer education program which aims to improve the livelihoods, sexual and reproductive health, and participation of young people in Tanzania through youth-led initiatives, were asked at the annual review meeting, what their motivations were for volunteering. The top five reasons cited in feedback forms included:

- Wanting to make a difference - do something to benefit communities in Tanzania; a sense of duty to do something about problems created by young people being inactive; wanting to do something about the government not fulfilling its responsibilities
- Education: To increase knowledge in SRHR, livelihoods, and civic participation
- Desire to volunteer: Had always wanted to be a volunteer
- Status: Volunteering would provide recognition and respect for the person in the community
- Independence: Self confidence and acquire skills for future livelihood and job

A common feature which stands out in both these sets of examples is the passion of young people to make a difference in the world, in addition to the personal skills development and experiential learning opportunities offered through a volunteering experience. Young people in the UK and in Tanzania in these examples are not so different in their overall ambitions in the world.

However, a critical question for volunteering organisations promoting youth volunteering in Africa is whether our programs live up to the ambition of making a difference in a community or in the world?

Case study one: *Anonymous Quotation from a former VSO Youth for Development Volunteer (International Volunteer)*

“I volunteered as a child rights advocacy worker in Kenya in 2008 – I had already volunteered in India in project coordination and that made me want to keep going with it. As I get older I often reflect on whether volunteering makes an impact in development – it’s clear to me that volunteering makes a real impact to the individual, I benefitted lots, but sometimes I’m sceptical about whether, on your own, you can make a real difference – there are exceptions, but unless you’re placed in a committed team or community that wants to make the change happen, then you could easily end up making no difference at all. There are still lots of placements like that. For me, I now work on a joint program with UNICEF and UNDP and would not have got that without volunteering experiences so it’s set me up, but not everyone wants a career in development.”

Youth refers to a phase of life when a person moves from a time of dependence (childhood) to independence (adulthood). If we are to truly engage young people in contributing to the development changes recognising that young people should be involved in defining what changes are needed in a community or society, then we need to understand their development at three levels:

- Young people are a group in society with unmet needs
- Young people are clients to programmes and services
- Young people are agents of change in the world ⁶

Where do we stand as international volunteering organisations in promoting social change? If we recognise the desire to volunteer itself as a development outcome, and the individual benefits that volunteering provides in creating a pool of active and skilled citizens – then volunteering organisations are definitely contributing to social change, but is it the kind of social change that young people in Africa or coming to Africa want to see?

⁶ Adapted from RFSU TMEP concept for effective men’s engagement, stakeholder meeting September 2011

Case study two: *Slum TV - Youth led community based organisation in Kenya*

Slum TV is a membership based organisation in Mathare (Nairobi's second largest slum) in Kenya. It was set up by three young men from Kenya and Serbia. From its inception it has been run on a voluntary basis by young people with the aim of re-defining how slum dwellers are perceived and giving young people living in Mathare to depict life inside an urban slum through their own eyes. Run by a core membership of around fifteen young people, the group trains young people in the community to learn how to use media (film, photography, blogging) to tell their stories. The members come together every month to decide the focus themes of their work each month, develop the stories, which are showcased every month in a public space in Mathare and attract around 500 people from the area who come to watch the films.

Its ethos centres on not being seen as an NGO, or trying to improve development, but simply to re-frame how we look at the potential of young people and the reality of the slum. Slum TV has won worldwide recognition after filming live scenes of the post-election violence witnessed in Kenya in 2007/08 and bringing to light police brutality towards bystanders which was shown on the BBC and Al Jazeera. For the month following the elections, the members decided amidst the media focus on the violence and political crisis in Kenya, to document stories and films depicting how people in Mathare were helping each other, to demonstrate that even in conflict, there are individuals and communities committed to peace.

This is an example of passionate and talented young people coming together with little financial resource to create something truly youth led and about fostering social change in the way they see it. It's not complex or labour intensive but is meaningful because it is shaped by young peoples' own interests as they see it, rather than what we perceive their interests to be. There are many examples of youth inspired initiatives like this which are about young people making a difference in their community or society in their own way.

What are the opportunities and added value that volunteering organisations can bring to foster an enabling environment for such initiatives to exist and grow in Africa? What's the benefit and risk of our involvement?

In the final example in this section (overleaf), youth volunteering in Africa can provide a space through which young people realise their own potential and ambitions, and are brought into development as a result of their volunteering experience. This could be considered a development outcome – the process of growing a generation of individuals committed to bettering the communities and societies:

Case study three: *Reflections from a development professional and former volunteering working with youth volunteering in Africa*

“I’m often talking to volunteers at the annual de-brief [annual review with volunteers after their placement] and many often comment that they hadn’t fully appreciated when they started what a difference volunteering would make to their lives. They had entered because there wasn’t much else to do – not enough funds to go to university, few work opportunities available – but not yet recognising that volunteering might expand their horizons.

When they finish we (Restless Development) and they find so many changes have happened. Many will opt to go into higher education or vocational training, which they hadn’t thought of doing before – perhaps they wanted to go straight into the workplace after volunteering. For me this is a recognition of a gap in their life that can be filled by education in terms of career, their income, but also in terms of the difference they can make in the world. Why? They also go on into degrees and training which they had not planned to do, and which seem linked to the problems they have found and felt passionate about – social work, community development, education, and finance and business administration. Why finance? Because so many see that a lack of resources and lack of skills to manage what little resources are there is driving the problems in the communities where they have worked. Their future course has been shaped by their experience in the field in a way they hadn’t planned for.”

Kennedy Oulu, Kenya, Monitoring and Evaluation Manager, Restless Development in Tanzania (and former VSO Volunteer Malawi).

3. Is it ultimately about the money?

The majority of young people in sub-Saharan Africa live on less than \$2 per day. Today, youth make up 37% percent of the working-age population, but 60% of the total unemployed.⁷ In utilising volunteering approaches, we may be able to strengthen a commitment to volunteerism as we saw in the last section. However, we potentially put at risk the spirit of volunteerism through the system of stipends and coverage provided which would otherwise not to be on offer to a young person from a disadvantaged community in Africa. In some sense, volunteering is a business and source of income for young people without access to livelihoods and employment.

Youth populations are growing faster than youth employment rates in Africa, and for employers and governments in Africa, having access to a skilled labour force to meet national needs remains a challenge. As such, investing in youth volunteering which contributes to skills development targeted to labour needs remains a high priority, both for the private sector and governments, and for young people where labour needs connect to their career ambitions.

Are the economic benefits the only reasons for governments, the private sector, civil society and young people themselves to invest in youth volunteering in Africa? Clearly there are other important benefits of investing in young people in general, and in particular, through youth volunteering.

A number of governments are now investing in youth 'volunteering' as a strategy to engage young people in nation building and civic participation, but a key question remains in what their motives? Are there multiple agendas at play, and where do we stand as volunteering organisations in ensuring we're not feeding into an agenda which is seeking to control young people in Africa?

Case study four: Government of Rwanda's Commitment to Promoting Volunteerism for Youth Development Partnerships Between International and National Volunteers

In Rwanda, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture in empowering young women and men to live free of poverty, discrimination and violence, UNV engaged in the joint program 'Delivering as One to Meet the Development Needs and Rights of Rwandan Adolescents', together with UNDP, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-HABITAT) and ILO. The Joint Youth Program increases the participation of youth through volunteerism and enables access to services in an environment conducive to the psychosocial, emotional and physical development of adolescents and youth. Two international and 11 national UN Volunteers serve with the program within the Ministry of Youth and in 15 districts of the country. The UN Volunteers helped build the capacity of the Ministry to rehabilitate the infrastructure for sports and games in youth centres, which are run by volunteers. More than 13,000 youth attended the youth centres on a regular basis in Karongi District between January and December 2010.

⁷ World Bank (2009), *African Development Indicators: Youth and Employment in Africa – The Potential, the Problem, The Promise*, New York

The breakdown of this figure shows how the project is reaching young people, particularly young women: of the total, there were 3,905 girls and 3,191 boys aged 10-19 years; 1,790 young women and 1,984 young men aged 20-24 years; 876 young women and 1,007 young men aged 25-35 years; and 110 young women and 120 young men above 35 years old. In each district of the provinces, over 1,000 youth volunteers engaged in workshops and discussions on volunteerism, human rights and environmental issues. Around 60 of these youth volunteers are peer educators and carry out sensitization campaigns on reproductive health, environmental protection, civic education and the promotion of volunteering. About 300 youth also took part in training on entrepreneurship, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health.

“These achievements are being sustained by the youth volunteer clubs that were established, 35 in the Rusizi District alone, which are working closely to initiate lasting community development projects,” says Jean de Dieu Sibomana from the Rusizi youth centre team. “The Joint Youth Program became a bridge to pass the volunteerism spirit on to youth and the entire community.”⁸

This is an excellent example of government and multi-lateral institutions coming together to engage young people to foster a culture of volunteerism and to address current national development needs which affect young people – it covers all three elements of the three levels of young people’s engagement. However, in societies where the government while creating social benefits is also restricting political freedoms, what are the risks to a youth social change agenda and to building a generation of leaders committed to positive changes, in mass government led service programs?

Again, identifying the specific added value to development brought about by the national-international partnership (beyond cross-cultural learning and personal development) is difficult to pin down, and a continuing challenge for volunteering organisations is to demonstrate how individual volunteer placements and partnerships contribute clearly to development outcomes.

⁸ UN Volunteers (2010), UNV Annual Report, New York

4. How does youth volunteering in Africa fit in with national and global development goals?

There are important and tangible benefits resulting from investing in youth volunteering in Africa which are directly related to contributing to national and international development goals.

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the significant potential of young people in development exemplified in UN Secretary General's Ban Ki Moon's statement that "We need young people's participation more than ever. Their energy and idealism can help make up for lost ground and achieve our development goals in full and on time". The World Bank, UNFPA and the Commonwealth Secretariat have all identified the role of young people in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with the World Bank arguing that this generation offers a 'unique opportunity to accelerate growth and development.'⁹

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have set a number of clear targets directed at youth populations, as set out below:

MDG Goal	Specific targets for youth demographic
Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education	Target 8: Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds
Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	Target 9: Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary, and tertiary education Target 10: Ratio of literate women to men, ages 15-24
Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases	Target 18: HIV prevalence among pregnant women ages 15-24 years Target 19: Percentage of population ages 15-24 years with comprehensive and correct knowledge of HIV/AIDS Target 20: Ratio of school attendance of orphans to school attendance of non orphans ages 10-14 years
Goal 8: Develop a global partnership for development	Target 45: Unemployment rate of young people ages 15-24, by sex

The examples given below demonstrate clearly a distinct value in promoting youth volunteering in Africa for development ends. However, what was difficult to assess was whether the added value had any connection at all to whether the volunteers were national or international, and for international volunteering to remain relevant this question needs to be answered, or to be radically re-defined so that there continues to be seen real value in investing in higher cost international exchange schemes within Africa.

⁹ World Bank (2007), *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation*, Washington DC

Conflict: A potential benefit for promoting youth volunteering in Africa is to address conflict which affects young people, and may involve young people. The five largest youth populations in Africa reside in Niger (49%), Uganda (49%); DRC (47%), Zambia (46%), Somalia (45%).¹⁰

Four out of the five populations have recently experienced, or are still experiencing conflict. Young people are both disproportionately involved in violent crime as well as being more likely to be the victims of crime and violence. Research shows that a youth bulge while an economy is weak can lead to political violence and social conflict¹¹; as we have seen recently in the UK, Middle East and in 2007/8 in Kenya. Therefore, investing in young people to use their time productively (particularly where jobs are not available) is valuable in avoiding destructive behaviours which affect young people and their societies.

In Burundi young people have been at the forefront of post-conflict reconstruction with youth service initiatives such as Jeunesse en Reconstruction du Monde en Destruction (Youth in Reconstruction of the World in Destruction) cited as having played a crucial role in addressing the needs of communities in the aftermath of war.¹² From helping to rebuild critical infrastructure, such as homes and hospitals, to dealing with the psychological scars through art and music, such initiatives not only address immediate needs but also contribute to wider goals of national peace and reconciliation. In countries such as Sierra Leone, where young soldiers struggle to re-integrate into normal life service-led programmes such as The Reintegration Skills Training and Employment Generation (STEG) have been an effective tool in helping them to develop a more positive outlook as well as develop their identity as young citizens.¹³

Health and HIV and AIDS: In 2007, it was estimated that there are 3.2 million young people living with HIV and AIDS in Africa, and that one in two deaths among young females in Africa is a result of AIDS or AIDS related illnesses.¹⁴ There is significant evidence which demonstrates that volunteer inspired approaches to promoting healthy living, including combating HIV and AIDS, have significant impact on promoting health not only among young people but also within their communities at large and therefore offers benefits for development goals overall. Here are two case studies below:

Case study five: Youth volunteering contributing to locally relevant development goals in South Africa

GroundBREAKERS, a leading peer education program in South Africa has played a key role in helping to tackle the problem of HIV/AIDS amongst young people.¹⁵ Training and supporting 18-25 year olds the programme has allowed young people to take an active role in addressing one of the issues which affects them and their communities. Such programmes have been cited as best practise with a recent review of peer-led interventions to reduce HIV risk in youth finding that these programs demonstrated success, particularly in effecting positive change in knowledge and condom use.

10 Population Reference Bureau (2009), *Population World Data Sheet 2009*

11 UNFPA (2010), *Investing in young people as part of a national poverty reduction strategy*, UNFPA: New York

12 Chae, S, Taylor, R and Douglas, A (2007) *Service as a Strategy: Post Conflict Reconstruction ICP*: Washington DC

13 Chae, S, Taylor, R and Douglas, A (2007) *Service as a Strategy: Post Conflict Reconstruction ICP*: Washington DC

14 UN (2010), *Regional Review of Africa – UN International Year of Youth* UN: New York

15 Alessi, B (2004) *Service as a Strategy: Youth and Community Development ICP*: Washington DC

16 Maticka-Tyndale, E and Barnett, J.P (2010) 'Peer led interventions to reduce HIV risk of youth: a review' *Evaluation and Programme Planning* 33(2)

Case study six: *Youth volunteering contributing to locally relevant development goals in South Africa*

An independent external evaluation of Restless Development's peer to peer education program in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania conducted in 2011 and assessing impact of its work between October 2008 – September 2010 which placed 209 national and international volunteers working together as peer educators in 100 communities had contributed to statistically significant reductions in knowledge and risky behaviours in Restless Development placement communities when compared to control communities in the region, including:

Increase in knowledge of HIV prevention methods:

Findings show that 94% of young people out of school in Restless Development intervention sites could mention correctly at least 4 ways by which they can get infected by HIV and how to avoid infections, compared with 65% among the controls. Focus group discussion (FGD) on condom use at the control schools revealed that 50% of those engaged had never seen a male condom while 80% had never seen a female condom compared with the Restless Development intervention areas where all had seen a male condom and only 10% had never seen a female condom. These findings are also backed with the fact that 98% of the respondents at the placements had attended SRH education events organised by Restless Development.

Reduction in teenage pregnancies: *In the schools visited where teachers' capacity was enhanced, and where peer educators were trained and involved in teaching young people about their SRH needs, teenage pregnancies decreased substantially. In 2010 the number of teenage pregnancies in primary and secondary schools at the 12 placement schools visited where Restless Development is operating was just one in all the 12 schools compared to 8 pregnancies from 8 control schools.*

Decrease in risky behavior: *Men and women with multiple partners (2+ partners) are fewer in the Southern Highlands (Restless Development operating areas). Findings from the evaluation indicated that the majority of women and men in placements (73%) had one partner, only (17%) had more than one partner and 10% had no partner compared with the control group from the same Southern Highlands at 64% and 36% respectively.¹⁷*

Role of volunteering: *At total of 209 national and international volunteers were placed as partners over a two year period in 100 placement wards across the Southern Highlands of Tanzania to deliver peer education in the classroom and in the community. The aim was to utilize non-formal education approaches where young people train and support other young people to improve their knowledge, skills, and capacities in sexual and reproductive health, and claiming of their rights through action to improve youth friendly facilities in their communities. The volunteers collectively reached directly 23,000 young people directly each year (approximate figures) through classroom and community based events.*

¹⁷ Amca Inter-Consult (2011), *Impact Assessment: Restless Development Peer to Peer Education Programme Tanzania AMCA*: Dar Es Salaam

Both case study 3 and 4 provide strong evidence of how young people in community volunteering, and national and international partnerships for volunteering can achieve very significant development results. However, a challenge identified as part of the evaluation process for Case Study 4 was being able to identify the distinct advantage offered through national-international volunteering partnership to the development results achieved.

Values based leadership and active citizenship: A specific agenda which is relevant in an African setting is promotion of values based leadership, particularly among the next generation who will go on to lead their country's development whether through public service, business, or with the development sector. Many youth volunteering programs include life skills training, but it was difficult to identify examples of programs led by an anti-corruption agenda for young people – one example of the National Anti-Corruption Volunteers Corp in Nigeria, which includes a Youth Corp as part of a national service program to improve local government accountability and for which 6000 young people were recruited, connects young people's desire and openness to change with national needs – but again there is little information available on the successes of this¹⁸ In the feedback received from the 59 young Tanzanian volunteers graduating from the Restless Development national volunteering program this year, 16 respondents mentioned reducing mis-use of funds or improving development of their communities by holding the government to account. What are the examples of youth volunteering programs in Africa promoting an anti-corruption and accountability agenda?

Case study seven: *Building young active citizens in South Africa (VOSESA)*

The groundBREAKERS are young people aged between 18 and 25 who show a commitment to civic engagement in their communities. groundBREAKERS receive training to carry out the 'loveLifestyle' programs and gain experience through their engagement. The groundBREAKER program aims to assist them in developing skills that foster their leadership, to study further or find employment, and implement the loveLife values in their own lives. The groundBREAKER program has graduated over 6,000 young people in six years. Through a telephonic survey, the employment and educational opportunities, attitudes and behaviours of a representative sample of graduates were assessed in order to understand how the graduates perceive the impact of the program on the development of their ability to be seen as role models, leaders and responsible citizens, as well as on their behaviour and attitudes in relation to HIV and AIDS. Nearly 50% of groundbreaker graduates now have some level of post-matriculation qualification, compared to only 8% who had such a qualification on entry into the program.

This is in contrast to the national statistics which show that only 6.1% of young people have any post-matric qualification (CASE, 2000). The graduates of the groundBREAKER program also have somewhat better employment prospects than the national average. Approximately 60% of groundBREAKER graduates are currently employed; this compares favourably to the national data which show that 36% of youth with matric are employed. Unemployment levels among the groundBREAKER graduates (38%) are considerably lower than the national unemployment figures for youth in the same age group and at the same education level (46%).

¹⁸ The Nation (2010), *ICPC Drafts Youth Corp members for Grassroots Anti-Corruption Crusade* <http://thenationonlineng.net/web2/articles/35287/1/ICPC-Drafts-Youth-Corps-members-for-Grassroots-Anti-Corruption-Crusade/Page1.html>

Employability and human capital: In today's economy, young people in Africa need skills beyond literacy – they need advanced skills and to have been equipped with workplace experiences which enable them to deal with the realities of the working environment. Growing completion rates at primary level, put pressure on the lesser invested secondary school and tertiary education sectors to ensure young people are moving through the system. However, many young people in African educational settings do not learn in school about succeeding in the workplace. Again, youth volunteering when strengthening skills and practical experience in project management, organisational development, finance and budgeting, working with different stakeholders, team work and inter-personal skills, are essential for creating a pool of young people in Africa that employers want to employ.

Case study eight: *Skilled Zambian volunteer peer educators deliver financial literacy training with private sector partnership*

The Partnership: *Zambia National Commercial Bank Plc. (Zanaco), one of Zambia's leading banks, aims to give young people an understanding of and confidence in, basic finance. Zanaco's program was started in February 2011 in partnership with Restless Development*

The Need: *Financial literacy amongst young people can make a drastic difference both at an individual and societal level in less developed countries. Enabling young people to gain broad, basic knowledge of financial skills such as budgeting, and instilling a desire to save has multiple positive effects at every level. Young people are often vulnerable during the transition to adulthood, and without financial literacy are less likely to save or have formal access to finance. This can make them more exposed to the shock of unexpected events such as illness, conflict or natural disasters. Young people can also be more susceptible to fraud or unclear marketing amidst the widespread and rapid expansion of financial products and services in Africa. These factors mean that young people can quickly find themselves in opportunity-crippling debt, massively impacting their other life chances, such as education or starting a business. At a national level, financial literacy is vital to reducing the risks to which banks are exposed, as well as encouraging informal sectors and the "unbanked" population to use regulated services, thus improving tax collection prospects in the long-term. In addition, well-informed consumers are better able and more likely to build national savings, monitor the banking market, demand improved legislation and oversight, and recognise and report bad-practise, compelling companies to be more transparent.*

The Solution: *The program was jointly developed by Zanaco and Restless Development following a pilot in Lusaka which fuelled public demand for financial education. The partnership provided financial literacy training to young people in rural communities and within teacher training colleges in Zambia.*

The Role of Volunteering: *40 skilled volunteer peer educators were recruited through Restless Development's established outreach, application, and selection process, and placed in rural sites and teacher training colleges. The curriculum included financial planning, savings, using bank services, borrowing, and developing a personal financial fitness plan. It was complemented by interactive non-formal education in life skills and healthy living (core peer education goals of Restless Development) utilising dance, drama, and music.*

The Role of Zanaco: Zanaco's CSR department played an active role in development of the curriculum, preparation and printing of resources for training, and attendance of workshops to provide advice to the young people attending. Zanaco also supported with an existing comic book aimed at young people on making financial decisions which were distributed to the sites. These are essential for enabling people with limited literacy to engage in learning and making choices who may not be reached otherwise. Zanaco has made an initial financial investment of 5000USD

The Results (so far): The program has been running for four months, and initial feedback is positive indicating – 10,500 young people for financial literacy training including 4,500 student teachers and 6,000 pupils aged 14-16 years in schools; As a result of the programme, Restless Development and Zanaco have been invited to input on the development of the National Financial Education Strategy being led by the Bank of Zambia.

Young women and girls: It is widely accepted in international development that focusing on the development of adolescent girls will go a long way to contributing to poverty reduction and the acceleration of achievement of the MDG.¹⁹ Adolescent girls represent a huge untapped potential in Africa (as well as around the world) and if addressed a break in the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Increased female access to and control of resources has been shown to have stronger returns on human capital compared to income under male control. In the case study below, youth volunteering provides opportunities for young women to develop their skills and self confidence:

Case study nine: *Experience of a Restless Development female youth volunteer in Tanzania (2008)*

“The moment I most proud of when I was a volunteer was being able to stand up in a room in front of a 100 people to do my first community session on human rights. There were mostly men in the room, and I could not believe that I could have the confidence to talk in front of people who were older than me and who were men. For me personally, it made me feel for the first time in my life that as a woman I can be an equal to a man. They saw me as an expert, they listened to what I had to say, and came to me after the session to ask questions.” Loveness Sanga, Former National Volunteer, Restless Development. Iringa Tanzania.

Placement role and support: 9 month placement at ward level alongside an international youth volunteer partner for the duration who worked as team to provide non-formal peer education to young people in schools and out of school, and to work with community stakeholders to support youth participation and development through edu-tainment events such as sports, dance and music.

Training received: 6 weeks onsite and follow up training in sexual and reproductive health and rights, life skills, human rights, and facilitation of community development activities including delivering peer education to young people and community members in schools and out of schools. Support included monthly meetings with program officers, follow up training after the first three months, and a final program review in which all volunteers received certificates.

¹⁹ UNFPA (2010), *Investing in young people as part of a national poverty reduction strategy*, UNFPA: New York

Benefit of national-international volunteering partnership (feedback from Loveness Sanga): *“During the placement period, working with Ali (international volunteer partner from the USA) helped me to learn about different people and different cultures, and this has helped me understand and work better with people; She helped me to question about why bad things happen to people; I have a friend for life (we are still in touch), and a network that is helping me with my dreams – Ali’s father is helping me to go to university to do a degree in social work, which I could never have imagined to afford on my own.”*

Challenges of national-international volunteering partnership (feedback from Loveness Sanga): *“Language is the biggest issue, as you need to speak good Swahili to work in communities in Tanzania. Ali had language training, but I was doing so much of translation and always having to facilitate discussions and activities she wanted to do. This was frustrating for her, and so I wonder whether she felt she really made a big impact. Also, culturally things were so different – it was hard to accept some beliefs and ways of doing things that the international volunteers talked to. Sometimes I felt, they were really from a different world from us. That was sometimes hard to deal with – like when they talk of what they plan to do next after volunteering, or with their lives, so many can just do it”.*

In this example, where national and international volunteers were partnered to work side by side, there is a clear benefit gained through cross-cultural exchange which enabled Loveness to think critically about the problems around her, and in this way, a distinct advantage brought by international youth volunteering programs which promote North-South exchange is in strengthening the capacities of young Africans to question assumptions about society and development problems. This is particularly important in African societies which are age hierarchical and as a result often do not recognise young people as having valuable contributions to make in decision making.

Social Capital and a Global Society: Providing young people with the opportunity to volunteer also offers benefits to the communities to which they return after their placement with evidence showing increased levels of political and civic engagement, whether international or national.²⁰

A particular element which can only be gained through international volunteering is development of cultural awareness and fostering a sense of global communities and global citizenship. Volunteering overseas can open young people’s eyes to a world beyond their own. Creating space for volunteers from different parts of the world to work side by side with young Africans can help to identify new ideas, ways of working, and connections to help solve familiar problems. A key challenge to this is transcending language barriers to enable international volunteers whether from other parts of Africa or outside of the continent to really engage at a community level where development problems persist.

20 Birdwell, J (2011) *“This is the big society without borders....”*: Service International DEMOS: London

Discussion

In many of the examples identified above, young people were placed in the centre of the program having space to lead development efforts but with support around them, all were strongly positioned in local, national and global development priorities and show evidence of how it not only benefitted the young person, but how it benefitted the wider problems being addressed.

However, it was difficult to find examples of comparative assessments or benchmarking exercises of youth volunteering programs in order to highlight why particular methodologies were more effective than others. Peer education as an approach in youth led volunteering models (where young people teach young people) was a common theme. However, from the research carried out it was difficult to identify:

- a) What was the distinct advantage brought by different youth volunteering approaches in terms of development impact and/or meeting the needs and interests of young people
- b) What was the distinct advantage of promoting international volunteering alongside national and community volunteering methodologies for development (the individual development benefits were clear)
- c) How do we uphold authentic volunteering approaches which place young people and volunteerism at the centre?

In order to answer these questions, there is a need to scale up efforts to:

- Evaluate the impact of youth volunteering programs in Africa against development goals
- Benchmark (compare) youth volunteering approaches in Africa looking at - methodology, role of young people, length/nature of placement, cost, connection to development, and results
- Develop a credible evidence base of research which proves why and how youth volunteering in Africa contributes to development targets
- Advocate for recognition of quality volunteering approaches and programs

As international volunteering organisations working with youth volunteering organisations and movements in Africa, if we step back for a moment from trying to do youth volunteering in Africa, and focus on enabling youth volunteering in Africa to grow and grow in its own way, then we need to be doing more of the above, and bringing our expertise to support grassroots youth inspired and led volunteering entities to make the case and make the space for their leadership.

Conclusion

Africa has long been seen as a continent in need of support. Today, there exist clear national and international development goals which provide direction and guidance to where efforts should be focused. It is clear that in young people we have a huge resource that needs to be supported to become the positive agents of change and leaders of society that many would aspire to be provided the opportunity. We should make the most of this resource, exchanging and benefiting our young leaders and our countries, continually importing and exporting our precious young talent to each other in a way that makes us all stronger.

To do this effectively, it is essential that we move beyond attempting to do volunteering and development for young people, and allow young people to drive, shape and do volunteering in their own ways. Our approaches need to place young people at the front of designing and delivering volunteering programs, and to appeal to young we need to inspire them to participate – this might mean creating more space for less ‘mature’ approaches to volunteering and development. For youth volunteering in Africa to be relevant, it is essential we position our programs to contribute to wider development goals beyond personal development so that volunteering is seen to be not just an investment in the individual but an investment in the nation and the continent; it is essential we set the standards to measure the quality and effectiveness of our work in youth volunteering; and put these standards into practice so we better understand what the critical success factors are in youth volunteering programs in Africa which are delivering results.

Finally it is essential that we demonstrate through evidence and through sharing positive stories that young people are an invaluable resource in development today and we should therefore not wait until they’re older to engage them in leadership and participation. We should start now because their energy, creativity and openness to change already has the potential to make a difference in development. This is critical in age hierarchical societies in Africa.