

HELPING PEOPLE OVERSEAS

A Practical Guide for Volunteers



DEV X CHANGE

Changing our world by helping people help people!

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A Practical Guide for Volunteers

By Beth Fellows

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This edition first published 2014 by
DEVXCHANGE INTERNATIONAL
A Canadian Registered Charity

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First Printing: 2014

ISBN:

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Preface

DevXchange is an international development organization established, motivated and operated by volunteers committed to helping people.

The idea for the organization was hatched in 2005 when friends and contacts kept asking us how they could become personally involved in the work we were doing overseas. At the time my husband and I were consulting for various aid organizations and our 27 years of humanitarian work had provided us with contacts in numerous countries around the world. We established DevXchange in 2006 and in the early days, we tried linking Canadian volunteers with implementing partners overseas. Match making was far less successful than helping Canadians who had already established contact with partners. We continue to be impressed by their enthusiasm and compassion for the poor and vulnerable groups and their ability to generate resources from their own network of friends and associates.

What seemed lacking was some basic principles in international community development to help them avoid the pitfalls of creating dependency, undermining local initiatives, or inadvertently ‘doing more harm than good’.

This short booklet is intended to provide volunteers with some practical principles and tips to help them with partner relationships, project design, monitoring, assessing impact and facilitating lasting results. In short we want to ‘help people help people’ *better*.

Beth Fellows
DevXchange Founder

Introduction

A century ago, few people left their homes, families, friends and culture to engage in mission and humanitarian work. Those who did were regarded in awe. They were pioneers, missionaries, and adventurers.

The humanitarian work of these early pioneers became overshadowed by the era of colonialism with its elements of exploitation and conquering of ‘uncivilized’ lands. It was a global race for control of land, natural resources, trade routes and human labour, instigated by competing colonial powers.

Following the Second World War development took on a new form with mission organizations and secular groups sending aid to rebuild countries devastated by war. Governments also became involved through the Marshal Plan to restore war-torn Europe. Development was motivated by compassion with an emphasis on giving material substance and teaching western technologies.

During the late seventies a shift began toward community-based development and bringing about positive change by ‘empowering’ community groups. Development work became more of a career path and a variety of approaches were studied and shared. Courses were designed to properly equip foreign, as well as local community development workers. Training was valued and essential to promote positive, lasting change.

By the end of the 20th century international development work had become a specialty field. Sectorial experts in health, education, water, and agriculture had emerged, along with professional advocates for human rights and social justice issues. Global forums and conferences turned out resolutions, standards and guidelines for interventions and measuring program impact. International development had become a highly technical industry.

Then comes the voluntourist!

With the new millennium comes a new phenomenon in humanitarian work. Continued global developments in travel, communication, and internet access are but a few factors which facilitate the involvement of a new breed of international development workers – the unpaid and for the most part untrained voluntourists.



This new ‘army’ of humanitarian enthusiasts emerges mainly from a ‘boomer’ generation reaching retirement with financial means to travel the world and share their knowledge and fortune (at least a portion of it). At the other end of the age spectrum is a generation emerging from universities with perhaps a broader worldview than earlier generations. Many have traveled internationally with their parents or school groups and consider the ‘GAP’ year as a ‘rite of passage’ – a time to explore the world before settling down, to gain unique experiences, or even to find themselves or find direction for their lives.

The ‘community empowerment’ development approach of the late 20th century has produced an environment conducive for voluntourism and ‘casual’ humanitarian involvement. Local non-government organizations (NGOs) or community based organizations (CBOs) are flourishing

Suddenly everyone is an international development expert.

But are untrained volunteers doing more harm than good?

and developing organizational strength to take on development initiatives among their own people. They are developing their own donor base with western organizations and individuals. The internet provides a

ready medium for generating awareness of projects and opportunities for individual participation. Voluntourism is a big business and anyone can be an international development worker. Sadly, many believe themselves to be instant experts in helping underdeveloped people.

At DevXchange, we believe volunteers have a great deal to offer, but we also believe their understanding of basic development principles is critical to their success in contributing toward positive and lasting change among those who could benefit from their help.

This booklet is designed to give volunteers a grasp of international development principles to enable them to be more effective in their efforts to help people in other parts of the world. Its focus is on individual and community development not development philosophies, macro-level development, nor global economic issues.

It builds on DevXchange's Mission, Core Values and Guiding Principles.

Our Mission

To help individuals and communities actualize just, peaceful and sustainable futures by facilitating innovative and effective interventions in developing countries, through a development exchange that contributes to the positive development of body, soul and spirit of both donor and recipient.

Our Guiding Principles

Neutrality – We are officially and publicly neutral on political issues – Respectful of the Individual – We take direction from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

Respectful of other Cultures – We respect the innate worth of other cultures and wherever possible preserve and/or strengthen non-harmful traditions and livelihoods.

Non-sectarian & non-discriminatory – No beneficiary is excluded on sectarian, discriminatory, or religious grounds.

Priority to Human Need – In selecting aid projects, first priority is given to human need and potential for building capacity of local entity.

Accountability – We adhere to high standards of accountability to both donor and beneficiary.

Voluntarism – We value and seek to foster the spirit of voluntarism and commitment.

Creativity & Professionalism – International development is both a science and art. Both gifts to humanity are encouraged and strengthened

Our Core Values

The People We Serve

The poor and physically suffering
The disadvantaged, isolated, marginalized
Those with limited access to other assistance
Those motivated to help themselves

The Members & Volunteers We Work With

Are committed and motivated
Are law-abiding citizens (validated by police checks if working in or visiting project areas)
Are innovative, adaptable and flexible
Are sensitive to and respectful toward all faiths.
Are non-abrasive, respectful of and cooperative with others; free to exhibit their own individuality but sensitive to appropriate etiquette and protocol
Have pride and professionalism in their work
Have a sense of humour and enjoy adventure
Value humanity above wealth and materialism

The Work We Do

Is to the genuine and maximum benefit of the beneficiary
Does no harm (environmentally, socially, culturally)
Discourages relationships of dependency and instead builds toward sustainability
Is collaborative with government and non-government agencies.
Enhances the ownership and capacity of the local people
Builds lasting friendship and understanding
Contributes to Christ's vision for our world: peaceful, just, restored and reconciled to God.

The Resources We Use

We are responsible and dependable.
We are cost efficient and frugal, not wasteful or abusive
We build the capacity of local skills, personnel and resources
We are accountable and transparent with the resources we use

1. Development is an Exchange

Western travellers, philanthropists, and retired professionals, have considerable time, experience and knowledge that can be channelled into improving living conditions and circumstances for people and communities in the developing countries. They have more to offer than just their money. Their **entrepreneurial spirit** and for-profit mentality is what many indigenous organizations lack to ensure their social development initiatives are sound and sustainable.

Conversely, indigenous organizations and the people they serve offer much in return by sharing their values, their perspective on life, their faith, strength of character and indigenous knowledge which enables them to survive in conditions far harsher than many of us in the West will ever experience. The interaction of social entrepreneurs with partners in the 'developing' or 'majority world' is a **development exchange** that's the cornerstone of our organization.



It is not about we/they or us/them in terms of who 'benefits' from our interventions. If we as donors/Westerners were to be brutally honest with ourselves, then we would admit that WE (donors) benefit at least as

"It is one of the most beautiful compensations in life...we can never help another without helping ourselves."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

much as the people we seek to help. One of the most powerful ways to gain the trust of people is to demonstrate our own weakness and to show them that we as interveners and Westerners do not have all the answers - that we can receive from them as well as give to them. This notion is an empowering concept for the people we seek to help - to recognize that they can 'give' and 'contribute' to someone who is so obviously advantaged in terms of material wealth.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Start with the attitude of a learner.
- Be attentive to and respectful of the way they do things. Ask before giving advice.
- Rather than hanging on to a 'have/have not' mentality, consider your humanitarian efforts as a more equitable sharing of wealth (not just material wealth but also knowledge and wisdom, spiritual insight, cultural richness, and character traits)
- Listen to their concerns and reflect on how you can give voice to their concerns.
- Recognize poverty has many faces. Think of ways we in the West are impoverished and how learning from other cultures can add richness to our lives.

2. Development is a Process - Not a Product

Volunteers or compassionate souls interested in helping people overseas often ask the question, “*What do they need? What can I send out?*” We westerners all too often want to fix the world’s problems with things or products.

Development is not about products, it’s about process. It takes time because the process for change must first take place in people’s hearts and minds. Outside resources and external advisors are often needed, but they should serve as a catalyst to stimulate a common vision and commitment toward change. They help to provide practical alternatives - not to do the actual work.



Before packing your travel bags with supplies to hand out, consider alternative ways of helping without causing unintentional harm. (Photo courtesy of Trip Advisor)

Many ‘humanitarian volunteer workers’ approach poverty with a Santa Claus mentality. They drop into an impoverished community or urban setting and start handing out products – oblivious to the complexity of factors that have created the poverty and despair. Worse still, they have no idea how detrimental their products can be. For example they don’t realize that by handing out supplies to a child on the street, they may be putting that child at risk by a street gang member who will beat the child up to acquire the goods themselves. Alternately, the hand-out could be undermining the entrepreneurial spirit of the merchant operating the tiny kiosk on the corner or a women’s cooperative making

the same products but with locally available materials, or even the child who attends school and sells items from a box on the street corner to pay for his books.

Many countries have regulations concerning importation of certain products, especially medicines or plants. Volunteers may find themselves in serious trouble if they don't take the time to research such regulations ahead of time.

As a rule, handouts are detrimental to the development process; they fail both the sustainability and the empowerment test in development initiatives. Exceptions would be in emergency situations or when a development worker is introducing a new technology or product and has a strategy in place to ensure long-term availability of the product or technology once the target group has accepted it.

True development involves building collaboration, developing a common goal or vision of what could be, assessing available resources, working toward a strategy for reaching objectives, and sharing the workload.



Development is a process of listening and working through solutions together.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Remember handouts and quick-fix solutions often do more harm than good. Keep in mind these rules for utilizing external goods and services in development projects:

- Enabling someone to learn a skill that creates a product using local materials is best.
- It's better to work through a local partner that is committed to a long-term development process than giving resources or inputs directly to needy individuals or people groups.
- If the product can't be made by the beneficiaries, buying from another local manufacturer is better than importing items.
- If the product is not manufactured in country, buying inputs for the beneficiaries from a national importer is better than bringing it in yourself.
- Always check regulations on importing goods especially medicines and plant products.
- Avoid doing for beneficiaries what they can learn to do for themselves. Remember your involvement is short-term; they are in it for life.
- Avoid actions that would speed up project implementation but would weaken the development process.

3. Development is a Partnership

The issue of project ownership has evolved over the years. At one time benefactors were principle decision makers. Then the emphasis was placed on communities or beneficiaries in a ‘bottom-up’ empowerment platform. With an ever growing United Nation (UN) presence and the pressure to achieve scientifically proven results, project management was often understood to be the responsibility of sector specialists or implementing NGOs. In more recent years, mega-organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), regional Development Banks and consortiums of western governments have put pressure on third world governments to set policies and regulations to reduce poverty within their borders within a set timeframe.

So whose project is it anyhow?

Successful development involves a partnership between community members, sector experts, Community Based Organizations or NGOs, government agencies and donors. Community energy seldom mobilizes itself; that is why it needs help. Governments are needed to adjust policies and regulations to create an environment for change. Experts can introduce new ideas and techniques, bring multiple perspectives (academic, business, non-governmental), provide training and build capacity, and help monitor change. However, governments and NGOs and especially short-term volunteers, cannot induce change within a target community without the community being empowered to decide on its own future.

It’s almost impossible for long-term transformation to be achieved during a short-term volunteer assignment. Rather than focusing on what you can accomplish or even get the beneficiaries (the group of people the project is intended to help) to do or not do, focus your effort on the people who will be there for the long-term – those committed to undertaking the development process. It’s your implementing partner – the

nationals who have invited you to help in their projects who facilitate this process. Helping them do their job better should be your objective.



*Not working with
her who has a
commitment to the
project to help, you
may consider if
it is doing more harm*



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Before you start:

- Ask yourself, 'who are the partners in this project?'
- Make sure you know relevant government policies and guidelines for importing any product, especially medicines or plants.
- Get the input of appropriate ministry officials.
- Find out what other organizations are doing, especially those with expertise in that type of project.
- And lastly, but most importantly, help project beneficiaries articulate their vision and expectations.

4. Development Accents the Positive

Throughout the 20th century, development was based on the perceived need of the beneficiary group. Complex analysis tools such as the Log-Frame Analysis (LFA) were developed to help development workers identify felt needs and root causes of poverty. Project proposals were designed with long lists of objectives and correlating inputs to address the needs of the target population.

Later models of development recognize the inherent strength and resilience of communities in the developing world. For the most part they are disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure, health and education systems, and economic opportunity, however they are survivors. It's not likely many of us would be able to cope in similar circumstances.

Development models like Appreciative Inquiry, SEED-SCALE and the Hearth model are based on researching and identifying the positive factors in a community and reinforce them to the common good of the whole community.

Spending time with the group you want to help, learning their customs, understanding how they think, and building on what they know enables a development worker to effectively introduce new ideas and concepts.

The Hearth Model, for example, recognizes that in every community there are households that exist in the same economic strata, are limited by the same lack of infrastructure and services and yet their children are healthier, their gardens are greener, their livestock is fatter and more content. The development process



therefore involves spending time researching what those households are doing differently and then organizing the mothers (particularly the ones with malnourished children) into learning groups to learn from and replicate the positive behaviour of the better-off families.

Similarly the Appreciative Inquiry approach conducts a series of interviews in the target community (individual and in groups) to help them identify their strengths. Development facilitators ask questions like “what does it look like when you or this community is functioning at its best?”. They encourage groups to tell stories of how they pulled through difficult circumstances, recording who did what and the outcome of those actions. Those positive characteristics are reinforced in the development strategy. Development is strengthened from within.



A mother's love for her child is a universal characteristic that can open doors for positive behavior changes to improve the well-being of the child.

Approaches that accept the positive empower communities. It guides them to a vision of hope and builds their confidence that they can determine and actualize their future.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Look for the positive features of a target group. Recognize them for the survivors they are and less as helpless victims.
- With your national counterpart (host agency) identify individuals that 'shine'. Allow them to tell you what they are doing and what they have learned that works with the resources they have.
- Keep your great ideas and new technology 'in your back pocket' until you have spent time learning the secrets of success and survival from 'the shining stars' in the target community. Try to complement their endeavours rather than ignoring or tearing them down.
- Use analogies from their positive experiences or practices when introducing new concepts or ideas.

5. Development is Equitable

Like every society on earth, third (majority) world communities are rarely peaceful, homogenous groups. There are usually individuals or factions that exploit others. There is often a historical root of conflict or tension that divides a community, either for political reasons, along religious affiliations, or based on tribal lineage. And of course, almost universally, there is the inequity of gender bias and subordination of females.

Many harmful practices that perpetuate inequality for vulnerable groups are protected by the guise and shackle of culture or traditions. Culture becomes a shackle when people are no longer nurtured or protected by social institutions but are subordinated to them. Consequently, equity within communities will not evolve on its own. Sometimes only outside pressure will convince local elites that their own future will improve when everyone benefits. This usually is a result of advocacy efforts to force governments to change policy and legal structures.



When you gather information on a community you want to help, be sure your national partner listens to vulnerable groups as well as those with power and influence.

As a volunteer, if you are not aware of these tensions and inequities, you may end up strengthening the hand of the exploiter or dominant

group. You may end up doing more harm to the most vulnerable than good.

Equitable development does not seek a stifling uniformity, but rather endeavours to shape contrasting views into a common good. Conformity is the goal of those who crave control, while processes that seek equity, draw from diversity and are always more creative and empowering.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Do all the research you can on potential areas of conflict and disparity (some of this can be found on the internet before you leave).
- Specifically try to find out how the various religious groups get along.
- Learn what the political power base is and how this affects local communities.
- Find out the role of vulnerable groups. Who controls spending in the family? How is decision making divided?
- Who controls natural resources (water supply, most productive land, grazing land, forests etc.)?
- When gathering data on a target population, ask your counterpart to ensure all voices are heard (men and women, old and young).
- Find out where your host (partner) agency fits into the picture. Your counterpart may also hold biases and align with one religious or political group, or hold the same cultural perspective on the role and treatment of vulnerable groups. If this is the case, you will need to approach the issue very diplomatically. Sometimes offering to hold or sponsor a workshop for the staff (bringing in a qualified national trainer if necessary) on development and peace building will open the door for open dialogue and learning new perspectives.
- Identify '**connectors**' – factors that unite the community, issues that have a common perspective (e.g. need for food or water throughout the dry season, the protection of children from certain diseases – or in urban settings from pornography or child abuse). Often communities unite by tackling a common problem.

6. Development is Integrated

Donors and governments have often jumped on ‘band wagons’ or promoted a ‘magic bullet’ approach to development. They will fund one sector such as water and ignore the fact that root problems are usually multifaceted.

For example, one of DevXchange’s first projects was working with an Ethiopian organization that wanted to begin development work among an isolated and disadvantaged tribal group. The tribe is semi-nomadic and has traditionally been hunters and gatherers. They practice indiscriminate burning and consequently are creating an environmental catastrophe. By holding focus group discussions in various villages, the team of volunteers helping the national partner learned that one felt need was for water. The project could have been limited to putting in wells and hand pumps in every community and could even have found a donor who wanted to put in sophisticated filtration systems.

However, if something wasn’t done about the disappearing forests and vegetation that help retain ground water, they would have had to deepen the wells each year as the ground water continues to drop. Replanting trees, teaching soil conservation techniques and water harvesting through ecological systems was a practical first step toward meeting the long-term need for year round water availability.

Addressing their felt need for water also involved environmental interventions to protect trees and other ground cover as their indiscriminate cutting and burning would continue to lower the water table.



Another example is DevXchange's project in Ghana. The Project Lead Member (PLM) wanted to establish an affordable, quality school in a rural district in Ghana. While donations from abroad helped the community construct a concrete school structure to accommodate over 100 enthusiastic students from Nursery to Class Four, regular income to support teacher salaries, school supplies and books was an ongoing struggle. Many parents were too poor to even pay the nominal school fees.



dialogue with the
 idea was hatched
 micro-finance pro-
 provide start-up
 ts to start busi-
 provide income
 en's education..
 micro-businesses

have been launched, each with 3

families per business. These micro-businesses include bee-keeping, pig-rearing, pepper farming, and batik & tie dye fabric making. Participants embrace this 'once in a lifetime' opportunity and are determined to see their children benefit in their education. The school development project is integrated with the microfinance program to provide better education for children and raise living standards and morale of the community.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Help your host agency identify what would prevent the group from getting the most from your help.
- Determine if there is a way to expand your project activities to include interventions that would fill these gaps or remove the barriers.

7. Development is Collaborative

Your partner may not have the necessary resources, nor interest in multi-sector programming. In this case, try linking your beneficiary group to government services or other NGO programs that can fill in any gaps to reach your project goals.

A good example of developing a well-rounded project through collaboration is Devxchange's Grassroots Youth Development project in Cape Town, South Africa. The project was built on the efforts of a local boxing trainer who wanted to help the kids in his township and keep them away from drugs and gangs. Initially the project focused on teaching the kids the disciplined sport of boxing.



They were able to get equipment donated from a local sports equipment distributor but mouth guards had to be custom molded.

By connecting with a dentist and company in Cape Town that specialized in mouth guards, the

participants of the project were able to get their personalized mouth guards prepared for free.

Ensuring the kids complete their education is another objective of the project. Since their current gym space and budget are limited, the project collaborates with two other Community Based Organizations (CBO) to run their education component. Ikamva Youth operates nationwide in South Africa and focuses only on tutoring. They have a strict model that has proven its ability to help kids matricu-



late. While, Ikamba Youth provides volunteers and training, the project committee obtained permission from the Partners in Sexual Health to use their clinic space on weekends for the tutoring. To ensure the kids



get adequate nutrition for optimum health and growth, they are negotiating with another CBO that helps women get established in their own bakery businesses.

Through collaboration, the project is able to help the kids

develop through athletics, education and good nutrition.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- In the planning stage of your project, work with your implementing partner to map out other services and programs in the project area.
- Be appreciative of what others are doing, encourage them and let them know how you plan to help.
- Get input from government service providers and other agencies working in the project area.
- Find ways to work together.

8. Development is Sustainable

Project sustainability is probably the least understood and most neglected aspect of volunteer initiatives and yet it is so basic and so vital to development success. In everything you do and in everything you bring into the project environment, ask yourself –

“How will this continue after I leave?”

Short-term volunteers may achieve some short-term goals, but often their efforts do not have lasting benefit. Unfortunately volunteers then put the blame on the very people they attempted to help, thinking them lazy or unwilling to help themselves. Here are a couple examples:

Volunteer X enjoyed sewing as a hobby and thought she would teach a group of women in Eritrea how to sew. She loaded her bags with special equipment and tools she thought would make the Eritrean women’s sewing much easier. She spent two days of her vacation demonstrating how to use the tools and through an interpreter explained some of the finer details of the sewing techniques. She returned home satisfied that she had shared her knowledge and helped a group of women in their livelihood training.

A month later a friend visited the same women’s group and found the special tools discarded and none of the women practicing what had been taught by Volunteer X.

A group of well-to-do women from the States visited a project of a large NGO in Kenya. The women had never witnessed poverty at this level before and wanted to do something – not just give money. The Kenyan project officer showing them around suggested they build a community centre for people in the community. The women got excited about this idea and returned with more friends and began to build. They covered all the costs, hired a contractor and actually spent days themselves digging ditches, lifting block, and carrying buckets of cement. The villagers watched with delight (and no doubt amusement). After a full week of this back-breaking work, the women returned home believing the centre would be finished within two weeks and that they had made a lasting contribution to the community.

A year later one of the women from the group returned to find the building still in the state of construction in which they left it.

What went wrong?

Consider adhering to the following principles to ensure your effort has more lasting effect:

a. Make sure it meets a felt need

Host agencies and beneficiary groups are very gracious and hospitable to foreign visitors (especially potential donors). They will accept what you have to offer – whether appropriate or not. Be sure the advice you receive from your guide or interpreter adequately reflects the needs of the target group and is not just their off-the-cuff idea.

Don't assume our sense of beauty or usefulness works in all cultures. Taking the time to ask your host agency or even the beneficiary group what skills they need will save you frustration later on. Go over your proposal or training lesson and material with your counterpart ahead of time and listen carefully to their feedback on what is useful and what is not.

b. Train the trainer not the trainee

So many volunteers want to work directly with beneficiary groups or do the work themselves. Medical teams want to heal the sick. Construction crews want to erect a building. In the end however, their efforts are wasted or at the most, have limited impact.

*Volunteers often want to 'do'
rather than 'enable'.*

Instead put your effort into building the capacity of your implementing or host agency – those that have a long-term commitment to helping the poor. Work with your counterpart to understand local culture, values and learning modalities and tailor your training style

and content to what your counterpart trainer can use. Try to train trainers in the same way they will be training beneficiary groups (e.g. storytelling, drama, demonstration, shared stories or experiences).



Trainers will often train others the same way they are taught. Train using methods that:

- *are participatory*
- *are culturally sensitive*
- *use traditional methods (drama, storytelling)*
- *use locally available materials*
- *build on local knowledge*

c. Teach principles

Rather than trying to show groups how to do a specific thing, equip your trainer to teach principles. Principles are universal whether working with cloth, seeds, or mud block. Once trainees learn the rules of working with various things, they can incorporate their own cultural design, and practical application.

d. Use local materials

Take time to explore local shops and markets, after all, this is what the trainees will have to work with. If you can't accomplish a task using what's available, how will they be able to do so once the training is finished?

What to do with donated equipment?

Kind hearted supporters at home often want to donate their used equipment (e.g. barber scissors, carpentry tools, knitting needles etc.). This is usually appreciated by trainees as the quality of western goods is usually better than what is available locally. Normally these types of inputs are okay provided that:

- *They don't cost more to import them than they are worth,*
- *The skill taught using these tools of the trade can easily be transferred to locally available tools*
- *The donation is minimal and does not interfere with or undermine the local economic base (e.g. importing containers of used clothing or cloth).*
- *If it cannot be maintained locally, then it is not worth sending.*

e. Make sure both the training and product are economically viable and marketable

Everything of value comes at a cost. Good development encourages fair trade for knowledge or skills development. If beneficiaries can't pay in cash, they can usually provide labour or payment 'in kind' or take out a small loan. When beneficiaries are obligated to pay something, they usually take the training more seriously, are more selective in what they spend their time learning and maintain their sense of dignity and control of their destiny. We teach our children that “**nothing is free in this world**” so they learn the value of money and fair trade. Why should we want people in the third world to learn differently?



DevXchange scholarship recipients at the Methodist School in Corozal, Belize, come in after school one day a week to help younger students read as a way of 'paying back'.

One serious draw back in donating materials or equipment is that it sets an unsustainable economic advantage for that group of beneficiaries. When the host agency tries to duplicate the training or project intervention without the donated materials their costs will be much higher and potentially unaffordable. It is therefore important to set the cost for training on locally available resources (human and material) to ensure the program can continue with or without donated items.

Western volunteers often want to teach techniques they know or methods to make products attractive to western markets. However, unless the volunteer also sets up a viable mechanism for exporting such products, they may find their efforts useless in the third world setting.

Before making the effort to transfer your knowledge to a beneficiary group – or even giving free advice, make sure there is a viable market for that product. Otherwise you will be wasting your time and more importantly – their time and limited resources.

f. Make it a ‘revolving fund’

Consider an approach that allows your donation (investment) to revolve or be paid back so others can benefit from your initial help. Several DevXchange projects are established on a micro-loan or revolving fund basis. Funds are given to groups who meet specific criterion so they can establish businesses or livelihood activities. Over a period of time the recipients are required to pay the investment back into the fund, either in cash or in kind (e.g. passing on chicks or baby goats to another family).



Micro-loans can be as small as helping a shoe-shine boy expand his after school business (New Hope micro-loan project in Ethiopia) or as large as helping a women’s cooperative build a cattle dip. (Kenya Microloans)

g. Make local connections

Western voluntourists often like to form teams and travel together on a ‘mission’s trip’ or self-tailored project. They spend months planning, packing, fundraising to cover their costs and then head out for two weeks to ‘make an impact’. And they occasionally do, but not always in the most helpful way.

Many of these ‘mission trips’ could be more beneficial if the members took time to connect with local professionals and community representatives. For example, medical teams that spend a couple weeks doing mobile clinic work from village to village, would have more lasting

impact if they invited a staff from the nearest clinic to join them or village community health workers (if they are available). Such a consideration would give recognition to the local health personnel (rather than undermine their credibility), and the foreign volunteers would learn more about local health problems and constraints in providing regular services. An even more sustainable approach would be for the volunteer team to spend their time upgrading the skills of the local medical staff so improved health services are available for villagers all the time.



wikipedia photo

Help to upgrade the skill of local health staff so some of the specialized services are available after you leave. Often services are not available because staff were never taught to use the donated specialized equipment.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Even in short-term volunteer assignments there is opportunity to strengthen long-term impact if volunteers remember the following principles:

- Make sure it meets a felt need
- Train the trainer not the trainee
- Teach principles more than procedures
- Use local materials
- Make sure training and product are economically viable or marketable
- Consider establishing a revolving fund
- Make local connections and strengthen local capacity

9. Development is Accountable

Among other aspects of international development, our DevXchange name implies the ‘give’ and ‘give back’ cycle of accountability. We are accountable to each other. We present donors with an opportunity to invest in human development through our implementing partner. Donors provide us with funds to get the job done. We give an accounting of how funds were used and what results were achieved, and they place their confidence in us to continue or do more. ... at least that is the aspiration of every humanitarian charity.

Accountability is a principle that extends beyond bank statements and balance sheets. It’s the aroma of transparency that should permeate every aspect of an organization. It’s the fiber of integrity that should unite stakeholders together in a bond of trust. Accountability seems like an easy principle and yet in development work it can be the hardest thing.

a. Accountability of funds

Good fiscal responsibility is at the heart of donor confidence. It also enhances the confidence of volunteers and other stakeholders and of course allows a charitable agency to retain its status as it’s monitored by government regulatory bodies. As a society we value financial accountability.



Checking financial records and tracking of funds should be part of every project evaluation and PLM project visit.

While unscrupulous people work in every organization, most indigenous organizations set up to help others are directed by leaders with integrity and want to increase their fiduciary capacity. They often do not have all the computers and programs we find so convenient in tracking funds, nor

the trained staff to keep up with adequate accounting practices. All too often resources for hiring qualified accounting staff and appropriate hardware and software are overlooked in project budgets. Training and capacity building in financial management is equally important for any development project and funds need to be allocated for this component.

b. Accountability of assets

Accountability is not just about money. We need to be equally responsible for assets and other resources entrusted to us – particularly those purchased with donor money.

The risk of death in Africa is more likely from a vehicle accident than from sickness, famine or war.

The project vehicle is one asset that probably gets the most abuse and misuse. Driving too fast, improper care, and carrying too many passengers are the main

causes of accidents and vehicle ruin. Careless driving also results in the death of project staff and unsuspecting volunteers.

If you are fortunate to have a project vehicle assigned to your project, ask one of the leaders in the organization about the safety regulations and maintenance schedule. If they don't have one, you may suggest adopting some of the measures listed in the box on the next page.

Keep in mind:

- The roads are often rough and precarious – especially at night and during the rainy season.
- Pedestrians and animals are unpredictable
- Some drivers tend to have kamikazi driving habits
- Speed limits are interpreted as 'how fast the car can go'
- If it does break down, know how to fix it (and have tools with you) or take a tent, water and food with you at all times.



A

Vehicle safety & maintenance:

P

Use a mileage record for each vehicle, stating the destination, no. km., driver, and project associated with each trip.

P

Ensure all seat belts are in working order and insist on their use.

E

Drivers must adhere to speed limits and use extreme caution when traveling through towns and on rough roads.

N

One staff members (preferably a designated driver or someone with mechanical ability) should be responsible for regular maintenance

D

(weekly check of pressure and condition of tires, oil, radiator water, etc.)

I

Before embarking on a trip, check (condition of spare tire, availability of tools such as lug wrench and car jack, extra water and dried foods e.g. nuts or grains, flashlight, blanket)

- Make sure copies of ownership and insurance are in the car for possible police checks.
- Project vehicles should be for the exclusive use of the project – not for staff household shopping, family outings, moving friends and relatives, or for political campaigning.
- Adhere to zero tolerance of drinking and driving or use of any narcotic substance e.g. quat.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Set a good example of accountability by keeping good records of your personal expenses while on your assignment.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions, and encourage the same for your counterpart – particularly for use and tracking of funds in the project you are working on.
- If you are uncomfortable with the way a driver is handling the vehicle say so.

Never hesitate to ask a driver to slow down if you think their driving is inappropriate for the road conditions.

It could save your life!

10. Development Achieves Objectives

With the growing cynicism of aid, accusation of corruption, huge overhead costs and general inefficiency of many aid organizations (the U.N. being at the top of the list), donors, national governments and the general public are demanding proof of results. As non-development professionals, voluntourists are especially targeted as not being goal oriented and even perceived by some as doing more harm than good. People want to know how their dollar is being spent and more importantly if it is making a difference.

Many funding institutions (particularly government) have rigid requirements for specifically defining project objectives and reporting on project impact.

As a volunteer, the detail of your objectives and management of results may not be as demanding as for grant funded projects; however, it is important that you have a clearly defined purpose to your being there.

If the project objectives are not clearly defined, clarify the project goals with your host agency. What do they hope to achieve through the project interventions? If the objectives are vague – like “we want to improve the health of people in this community” you may need to break it down to specific health issues that can be reasonably monitored. What indicators help you know that the objectives are being met? Who will do the monitoring and how will the indicators be monitored?



Tracking the number of students graduating from a skills training course is one verifiable indicator. DevXchange's New Livelihoods project graduated 164 women over a six year period.

Along with tangible, objective indicators, consider subjective indicators of change. Think not only in terms of physical wellbeing but emotional, spiritual and psychosocial wellbeing as well.



The Mulu Wengal Church, implementing the New Livelihood project, provides spiritual and emotional counseling as well as vocational training.

Results do matter, but don't think you need to do it all yourself or come up with all the answers. Learn from the mistakes of others and incorporate the collective learning of six decades of 'community development work'. Speak to local government officials (health, agriculture, forestry, social welfare etc). What are some of the best practices they know of that would bring about the positive impact you want?



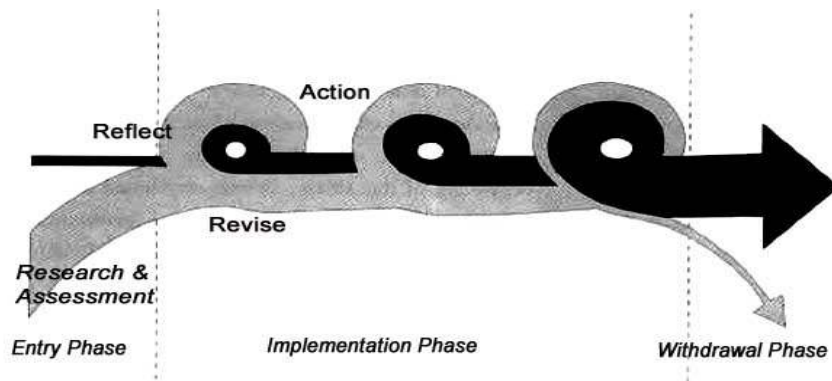
TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- Be clear on the objectives of your assignment and the project you are involved in. If appropriate help your counterpart better define the project objectives with clear indicators for measuring progress.
- If your time is short, write out monthly or even weekly objectives and at the end of the week, check what progress has been made on the project and what progress you have made personally.
- Research what others have done to meet similar needs. Check the internet, read books, ask Devxchange Advisory Council members to share their knowledge of best practices.

11. Development is Recursive

Good development is a recursive process. It takes time to gather research, analyze, and plan before implementation begins. Then as the process slowly builds in activity and then into full operation, it enters a phase of reflection, measuring progress, evaluating effectiveness and efficiency. This often leads to changes, improvements; perhaps even alternations in strategy to enable implementers to more effectively achieve their objectives. Once this occurs, focus once again is on activity, this time with more confidence and hopefully effectiveness. In simple terms, it's a process of Action, Reflection, and Revision.

The process is repeated continuously, and yet the project never slows down – unless of course the reflective phase requires major adjustments.



How often does this occur? The cycle may take place on some level at least monthly, sometimes even weekly – depending on the complexity of the project. For DevXchange projects, we facilitate an opportunity to reflect and revise at least every three years. If the project budget is less than \$15,000 over a three year period, we try to engage other members to visit the project and undertake a 'Peer Verification'. If the project budget is over \$15,000 we try to organize a Project Evaluation facilitated by a community development professional.

As a PLM, you can facilitate the recursive process every time you visit your project. Consider these steps:

- review your progress
- document successes
- identify barriers
- make any necessary alternations in your approach or activity
- develop objectives for the following period (coming year)
- continue with project implementation



The recursive process leads to good development and good development is often replicable. In fact most strategies are set up with the intent to expand and to do the same thing in other areas. In time it is even hoped the behaviour changes brought about by your interventions will spread on their own as other individuals and communities see for themselves the positive impact that is produced.



TIPS FOR VOLUNTEERS

- As part of each project visit, schedule a time with your implementing partner to go through the recursive process.
- Take full advantage of 'Project Peer Verification' visits or Project Evaluations by reviewing the findings and recommendations with your implementing partner. Ask the Evaluator to clarify recommendations if necessary.
- Share your challenges and successes with other PLM who have similar projects. Learn from each other.