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# A Shift in the Sector: International and National Volunteer Development Strategies in Modern Nepal

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*SIT Study Abroad*

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**A Shift in the Sector: International and National Volunteer  
Development Strategies in Modern Nepal**

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## **Abstract**

The complicated political, social, and economic landscape of Nepal marks it a country in need of development as a means to improve poor conditions within a culturally and religiously diverse country. NGOs, INGOs, and bilateral agencies have emerged in Nepal in the name of development. It has become increasingly popular to send volunteers into developing areas to meet the goals of organizations. Looking broadly at the volunteer sector in Nepal, there is such a complex nature to development as the needs of communities in which these organizations serve are changing. The various strategies that volunteer organizations use to place their volunteers, to assess local needs, and to approach development vary and range from entirely grassroots efforts to those that are more "top-down". This study attempts to understand the nature of change within Nepal and how volunteer development organizations are changing their training, recruitment, and development strategies as well as how new local organizations are emerging to meet the needs of Nepal and its communities.

**Key Words:** *volunteerism, development strategies, social change*

## **Dedication**

To Nepal. For your acceptance, beauty, and amazing people.

I am forever grateful.

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## **Table of Contents**

Introduction.....	1
Methodology .....	5
Research Findings .....	8
Discussion/Analysis .....	23
Conclusion .....	26
Appendices .....	28
Bibliography .....	30
List of Interviews.....	31

## **Introduction**

Often volunteerism and development are concepts that seem to come hand in hand. However, the notion of volunteerism is not new to Nepal, nor has it always been linked to the idea of development. Hinduism and Buddhism, Nepal's two major religions, "teach that any voluntary work that brings relief and solace to the people in distress leads one to salvation or moksha" (Jamarko 2012, 1). Through voluntary service, many believe they can achieve better future births and are willing to sacrifice their time and means to benefit others. Beyond the motivation of religion, the spirit of volunteerism has been important to Nepal and its communities. The National Development Volunteer Service notes "the spirit of volunteerism is in the ethos of Nepalese culture as it is quite apparent from the tradition of practicing voluntary activities based on mutual assistance by the host of ethnic communities of the country". This sentiment gave me a sense that volunteerism is not something which needs to be formalized to be legitimate among Nepali people. So much of the culture is focused on community, and on improving the lives of everyone holistically, that the notion of giving time is not foreign in the least. A challenge however, is "in contemporary times, disrupted and distorted by social, political and economic strife, the origins of the volunteer spirit and civic service are sometimes forgotten" (ibid.)

While volunteerism has roots in Nepal, the understanding of what it means to be a volunteer changed drastically when Nepal opened its doors to international aid and development in the 1960s. A slough of INGOs and bilateral agencies were welcomed by the government of Nepal to help improve the livelihoods of its people through various sectors. In order to meet this

development need, international agencies such as Peace Corps, Volunteer Services Overseas, Japan International Cooperation Agency, and ActionAid emerged, placing their volunteers and resources into Nepal. On average, these organizations have worked towards Nepal's development for over 40 years, sending volunteers to complete service in various sectors including education, health, civil engineering, agriculture, and infrastructure.

However in the past decade, these international organizations have begun to adjust their development strategies and volunteer placement due to political and social changes in Nepal as well as due to outside factors such as funding and security limitations. Interestingly, a trend of national volunteer-based development organizations has emerged during this period as a means to fill the gaps that international bodies cannot meet and to get Nepali volunteers involved in their communities as they used to be. Local agencies with the intention and motivation of developing Nepal through improving health, securing livelihoods, increasing human rights awareness, and other issues are making use of local knowledge through using a community-up approach.

This shift in the development through volunteerism sector is widening the profile of who can develop Nepal and which methods can be used. This reshaping of the development landscape is based on changing times and changing needs. The dynamics of volunteerism in Nepal- with political instability, immense social diversity, and many people living below the poverty line- make development quite tricky and complex. It is through this research that I break down how the pulls and pushes of both international and national agencies work in different ways to achieve development for Nepal.

### *Research Objectives*

The development sector in Nepal is filled with various opportunities for international and local volunteering, all hoping to contribute to the overall wellbeing of the country and its people. There is so much attention given to the cause of development and its positive effects, but not enough on the practical and real life experiences of volunteers in their communities. It only seems appropriate to evaluate the ways in which organizations go about assessing community needs, placing volunteers in those communities, and understanding the effect volunteers have on the community. The objectives of this research are two-fold: 1) to understand the various ways in which volunteer-based organizations approach development and 2) to try to understand the limitations that exist between the volunteer and their local community and understand the changes that are taking place. This research poses a number of questions: What communities do volunteers serve? What are challenges that volunteer organizations and volunteers face? How are organizations adjusting to changing ideas about development? What new organizations are emerging to meet Nepal's needs? What sort of relationship emerges between a foreign volunteer and their community? And most importantly, what is the role of the volunteer? Through answering these essential questions, this research attempts to dissect the complicated nature of development and understand the ways in which volunteer development organizations are limited and in what ways they complement each other to round out the volunteerism sector of development.

### *Perception of International Development*

Although there is good intention behind development work, a limitation exists between volunteer/aid-giver and local recipient. This phenomenon is critically observed in Hancock's study in which

...for increasing numbers in the third world, development organizations, volunteer agencies and international aid in general have come to mean little more than loss, danger and alienation...Today, as a result, we are seeing an emergence of a new phenomenon- poor people who no longer want to be 'helped,' who mistrust and reject the poisoned gifts thrust upon them by outsiders (1989 13)

Ideas surrounding volunteerism and foreign aid, however, are quite contentious. While Hancock's observations reflect a skeptical view of volunteerism, the National Planning Commission's (NPC) National Development Volunteer Service (NDVS) portrays a "spirit of volunteerism" as an important means of creating and fostering "mutual trust and social harmony" (Volunteerism 2002, 5). Volunteers are seen as "role models in promoting volunteerism [...] that improve the living conditions of the rural and poor people" (6). In this manner, volunteers are portrayed as a necessary catalyst for change in developing Nepal within "backward communities" (ibid.). Hancock and NPC's conflicting perceptions of volunteering reflect the complicated nature to the debate within Nepal.

## **Methodology**

A combination of methodologies was utilized in order to address the aforementioned research questions, which included volunteer site visits, participant observation, and interviews with non-affiliated government organization staff, volunteers, volunteer counterparts, and community members. Altogether, research was conducted in the Kathmandu Valley's towns of Dillibazar, Sanepa, Jawalakhel, and Jhamsikhel as well as in the Middle Hill towns of Milanchowk, Pang, Devasthan, and Pokhara.

Scheduled meetings with PC, JICA, AA, and VSO officials began my research as a source of background information of international volunteer organizations. Through various connections, my research expanded to look at national volunteer programs as well and I was able to meet with EngageCorps and Activista. Interviewing staff about the organization's history in Nepal and its strategies for placing volunteers gave me a foundation with which to start. From these interviews, I was also able to pick up pamphlets, volunteer brochures, and published reports on the organization from offices.

Site visits of six Peace Corps members gave me the opportunity to see the lived experience of these international volunteers in a village setting. In these close interactions, I shadowed volunteers throughout their communities and at times their host families or local government counterparts accompanied us and shared their thoughts. These site visits allowed me to see the life of a volunteer and understand how theory may differ from praxis, allowing me to contextualize the information gleaned from head office officials. While I was only able to meet, interview, and observe six PC volunteers of the eighteen serving, this subset population provides a representation of the volunteer in the

PC. For those volunteers I was not able to visit, I sent interview questions to three participating volunteers and received responses. From these, I was able to interpret a few other perspectives from the field.

I interviewed two VSO volunteers and one JICA volunteer whose volunteer service and research are taking place within the Kathmandu Valley. I also attended one *Valuing Volunteering* workshop in association with one volunteer's research and service. Of the forty current VSO volunteers serving, I recognize the narrow scope of speaking with only two volunteers, and was limited by access as over thirty of VSOs volunteers are placed in the Far West regions of the country and have limited access for Internet correspondence. The one JICA volunteer I met with was a chance encounter and interview and it is important to note that the information obtained is merely one opinion and experience of a single JICA volunteer.

At ActionAid I was able to sit down with four staff members and held two group interviews including members of Activista and ActionAid's Global Citizen course's volunteers. These group interviews allowed for a lot of stories to be shared and made the discussion about volunteering and learning open. I had the opportunity to interview four volunteers individually after the group session and learned their personal interests and future plans.

I was able to speak with eight volunteers involved in EngageCorps in a group setting. After that session I was able to speak with three volunteers individually regarding their personal challenges and successes.

It should be noted that for all of the volunteers I interviewed involved with international organizations, access and contact was not given through the

head offices. In the case of PC, VSO, and JICA, the information of their volunteers could not be shared with me as an outsider to the organization, so every interview and meeting was a chance encounter. Access to volunteers is restricted as security is of top concern for each organization. In addition, I was limited in my ability to communicate with possible participants, not just logistically, but also linguistically, as many volunteers cannot speak English coming from a variety of countries.

Taking the approach of conducting background interviews with head offices, more personal interviews in case studies, attending informational sessions as a participant and observer, and collecting marketing and educational materials from organizations gave me a variety of ways in which to learn my information. I recognize my possible bias towards the Peace Corps as they are American, young, and were more accessible, however, I attempt to put aside these common factors when discussing their service at look at the organizations as a whole in relation to Nepal and its development. By conducting research using variety methods, I was able to get both inside and outside information, ideally giving me a larger picture of the volunteer sector in Nepal. For all human subjects interviewed, informed consent was given and no vulnerable voices or subjects under eighteen were consulted in this research.

## **Research Findings**

Development through volunteerism is an approach that utilizes those who are willing and able to give their time, knowledge, and skills to those in need. This method of development is a model that each of the four international organizations I focused on utilizes, but each to a different degree. Meeting with the head offices of PC, JICA, VSO, and AA, I acquired background information about each organization including its history, its approach, and its volunteers. The strategies vary from diplomatic, holistic, rights-based, and grassroots.

### *Foundation*

For Peace Corps, involvement in Nepal began in 1962 with the intention of establishing “world peace and friendship” between its volunteers and Nepali people. As of 2012, nearly 3,670 volunteers have served in Nepal at the request of the government of Nepal to assist with development in education, health, environment, food security, and agriculture. In 2004 volunteer service in Nepal was suspended due to the Maoist Insurgency and PC’s concern with its volunteers’ safety and security. Newly reopened, the PC has made changes to its development strategies, volunteer recruitment, and training to meet the needs of changing society in Nepal.

AA Denmark has its roots in Nepal since 1986 with the focus of “building local democracy, land rights, and conflict management” (ActionAid 2013). In the past three years, the organization has shifted from a more holistic approach to a strong activist perspective and rights-based approach, as Activista emerged as a global youth network for young volunteers. Activista’s

Global Platform, a training for youth involved in social activism, works to educate both Nepali and Danish volunteers on various social issues. Suran Maharjan, Global Citizen Facilitator, describes the program as a cultural exchange in which the diversity within volunteers creates a dynamic space within which to work as young volunteers learn about issues related to globalization, politics, and development.

VSO has worked in Nepal since 1964 as an international development organization, initially addressing the needs of many remote districts of Nepal. Its long history in educational development has remained, though its focus in the last few years has been split to meet needs of securing livelihoods and improving health of Nepal's poor. VSO's International Citizenship Service (ICS) program is a way for 18-20 year old skilled and interested volunteers to be engaged in development projects without having the years of expertise that typical VSO volunteers have. In addition to its ICS and traditional volunteer programs, Raj Kumar Ghandarba, Education Program Manager, emphasized VSO's strategy of partnership. Through long-term volunteers, short-term specialists, national volunteers, knowledge brokering, and advocacy, VSO's focus on building strong partnerships with government, NGOs, INGOs, civil society, and private sector is made possible.

JICA's involvement in Nepal began in 1970 to meet needs in "agriculture, forestry and fisheries, repair operations, civil engineering, sanitation, health, education, culture, and planning and administration (JICA 2013). Its first batch of volunteers in the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) cooperation scheme ranging from 20 to 39 years old served to assist with social-economic development while "promoting mutual

understanding and friendship between Nepal and Japan” (JICA 2013, 1). This wide breadth of outreach as a bi-lateral agency allows JICA to be multi-dimensional to meet various community needs. In 1990, senior volunteers (SV) were recruited with the aim of fulfilling the greater need for experts that have experience in specific focus areas of development such as city planning or civil engineering. According to Sushil Kumar Bhattachan, Chief Advisor of JICA’s Nepal office, the SV position arose out of communities’ demand for those with knowledge, experience, and high qualifications.

### *Development Strategies of International Bodies*

In the case of PC Nepal, Charles Enciso, Director of Programming and Training, emphasized the importance of person-to-person relationships for its volunteers. By utilizing a community-up approach, volunteers are able to experience cross-cultural exchange with two-way learning emphasized. Charles discussed the importance of PC volunteers’ ability to connect with their communities and form friendships with Nepali in order to gain trust and implement their assignments as health and agricultural volunteers.

Backed by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)’s Feed the Future program, PC Nepal is financially tied to the U.S. government’s funding. This means that PC volunteers have been sent to meet the goals of this INGO and accordingly, their volunteer assignments are within the health and agricultural settings serving to improve the nutrition of Nepal’s poor communities. While USAID’s support provides financial backing, Nepali government approval and local village acceptance is important to placement of its volunteers.

With recruitment bases around the world, VSOs volunteers are not representative of a single country as AA, PC, and JICAs volunteers are. Through recruiting international volunteers from both developed and developing nations, VSO's aim is for its volunteers to "share expertise, knowledge, and experience not normally available locally" (VSO 2012, 6). Ghandarba explained, that it is through partnership and through learning with ones counterpart that a two-way exchange can occur.

Together with ActionAid, Activista works to utilize young people to "fulfill young people's right to participate in their own development" (ActionAid 2013). This strategy of utilizing young international volunteers alongside national volunteers creates a spirit of togetherness and camaraderie, which AA believes younger generations can inspire in others.

The mission of an organization is meant to reflect its focus and goals in development. By gathering each organization's mission, it is clear that each has a different focus although they are united under the common name of development. See appendices 1.1 and 1.2 for mission statements of international and national volunteer agencies, respectively. Through looking at each organization's mission, it reflects the head agency and country's goals as well as its intentions with its volunteers and the community.

### *Training*

For each international volunteer organization, some sort of training prior to service is required for volunteers. Across the board, training involves cultural, Nepali language, health and safety, and organizational background information. The extent to which these trainings focus on each topic, however,

varies.

In the case of JICA volunteers, two months of Nepali language training in Japan followed by one month of in-country training prepares them, ideally giving them the ability to properly communicate with locals. JICA volunteers live on their own and work with local government counterparts such as the Ministry of Agriculture or the local VDC office to complete their service.

In contrast, VSO's volunteers receive a short one-week language training to allow their volunteers to introduce themselves and get around, but communication in Nepali is not emphasized. Instead, years of development expertise and technical training are valued among volunteers. For VSO volunteers, they are also living without a local family and have their own space.

PC volunteers receive three months of language and cultural training with a few weeks of technical training related to their assignment. For their two-year service, volunteers are assigned a homestay family to live with, learn from, and to become a part of the community.

For AA, these young Danish and Nepali volunteers go through a three-month education and training filled with discussion and active participation intermittently broken up by hands-on volunteer experience. For the volunteers with AA, their whole service is an extended training on how to be a Global Citizen. Living at the program house facilitates their in-country experience, with Danish and Nepali volunteers residing under one roof.

### *Challenges of Organization*

As an organization, challenges with access, geographic isolation, understanding new generations of volunteers, dealing with security and wellbeing of volunteers, and Nepal's unstable political landscape represent the most dominant themes I encountered from head office officials.

New generations of volunteers require more structure, more engagement, and hands-on application than former years. This means that organizations must support this need and try to offer guidance when possible. However, as Enciso of PC explained, this cannot always be easy in a place like Nepal where connectivity through Internet, phone, and mail cannot always be ensured. Connectivity to "the outside world" can also be a challenge for organizations because it can detract from engagement with local communities, and sometimes threaten the wellbeing and happiness of volunteers who miss home.

One of the largest challenges is Nepal's political instability. This makes security a high priority for organizations and restricts access to those areas of Nepal that lack the resources and development that is truly needed. Enciso remarks, "while global policies have been created so that our volunteers must be within 24-hour access to ensure safety of volunteers, it is not good for those communities without access". VSO's Bhandari echoed this sentiment saying that access is always a challenge.

In addition, Nepal's political instability makes local government offices international organizations partner with seem quite "dynamic" as constant change of staff within local offices makes communication and relationship building difficult. "Since the government is unstable, relationships

can't last. But we need those senior staff to get things done" remarks Bhandari. JICA volunteers are similarly restricted to certain districts deemed "safe" because for the head office, "security is strict" claims Bhattachan.

#### *Perceived challenges of volunteers by organization*

For ActionAid's diverse young volunteers, the main challenge Maharjan for his volunteers is emphasizing that different ways of doing things for Danish and Nepali are acceptable. The cultural differences may represent a barrier for development or connection when volunteering with NGOs or community organizations.

Some challenges that Enciso perceived PC's volunteers might encounter include navigating complications of the caste system, which can often be "confusing and culturally quite different from the U.S.". Enciso remarked that Nepal's religious and ethnic diversity is beautiful and interesting, yet sometimes challenging for volunteers since it is so different. In addition, there are different ways in which Nepal's national and local government offices are structured so that certain people cannot be accessed in assessing community needs. For example, women and Dalits- highly marginalized groups within Nepal- may not be accessible based on societal structure. Gender development is incorporated as much as possible into the PC's strategy for its volunteers, but it can sometimes be difficult for female volunteers to gain access to certain spaces because of their sex.

#### *Reception and Role of International Volunteers*

No matter one's intention, it cannot be helped that not everyone will

understand or appreciate a volunteer's presence in their community. For each volunteer I interviewed, I inquired as to how they felt their presence was received in their community. For many, their nationality, sex, educational background, work experience, class, and outsider status reception often gets in the way of their service. Just as the head offices had anticipated, I found that many of the possible challenges volunteers face in the field were the case.

Volunteers coming from Western countries often feel labeled as high class since they are often well-educated, white, and English-speaking. In terms of class, Voranan Mongkolpumirat, PC health volunteer, describes being from the West where "people look at you and they just see dollar signs". She explains how difficult it is to communicate her own story without people assuming she is rich and how that perception can often be a barrier, preventing her from getting to know people in the community that she would like to connect with.

The value of English within Nepali communities gives the volunteer an interesting relationship with many village members. Lizzie Hacker, Valuing Volunteering Researcher and VSO volunteer, noted that in many villages, English-speaking volunteers are seen as quite valuable, educated, and therefore useful to young Nepali seeking to learn English. Learning English is so much of a status marker as it is the language used in business, and higher paid jobs.

The issue of being an "expert" often arises for volunteers as both a crux and a blessing. In the case of Alejandro Cuyar, PC agriculture volunteer, he struggles to win over the trust of his community because of his status as an

American and because of his young age and little working experience in agriculture. For Alejandro, the biggest challenge he faces is convincing villagers that their method of agriculture and farming may not be the most effective. “I come in and they see me and I’m just a guy, you know? I’ve never worked on a farm before, but I’ve learned that I can help improve their farming techniques and make their food better and last longer. It’s so hard convincing people”.

In contrast to Alejandro’s constant challenge of winning over villager’s support, Lizzie Hacker has found in her research understanding the value of volunteerism on reducing poverty that while being from the West often gives volunteers a heightened status when entering communities, that immediate perception of being seen as an “expert” often prevents local ideas from coming into fruition. Miwako Fujii, JICA Community Development volunteer, similarly does not want her ideas to be taken as the final word. Miwako said, “I must be careful with my words. I cannot say big things. I need to see things from their point of view” in regard to going into communities and understanding needs and possible solutions to local’s perceived problems.

Mike Rosenkrantz, VSO volunteer and Fundraising/Organizational Development Adviser, felt similarly expressing his desire as a volunteer to be a resource and an ear to help out communities in any way he can. Recognizing his heightened Western status, Mike emphasized how he could utilize his experience, his education, and his work in development to achieve what others may not be able to for Nepal’s communities. Ben Ayers, former volunteer and current DZI Foundation Nepal Country Director, says “Nepal has taught me to

shut up and listen.” His perceived role as an outsider to the communities he serves in rural Nepal is to be a facilitator, one voice, a resource, a connection, meant to support and encourage development that communities truly desire.

### *Other Challenges*

I found that gender-related issues are an adjustment for many volunteers. The lack of female attendance at meetings, in workshops, and at places where volunteers are supposed to get their community’s feedback is often frustrating and difficult to negotiate. For Voranan, PC health volunteer, she says that being a woman is both a blessing and a curse. As a woman, Voranan feels that more women can come to her for help and often confide in her. Yet, many leaders of her local VCD and head offices where her health post work is required, building relationships is tough when men do not let her in or receive her the way they do with other men. She said, “it’s hard to be a woman here”. In contrast, Lisa Bauer, PC agriculture volunteer, describes her perceived role as a woman and volunteer as a “leader and great bearer of knowledge” and a “friend, one with good intentions”. Even for male volunteers, the gender differences in Nepal compared to being in the United States are an adjustment. “I almost feel like a feminist now that I’m here. I see the way some men treat women and I don’t think it’s okay” says Brandon Hugueley, PC health volunteer. I found that understanding the cultural differences between the treatment of men and women in Nepal was an eye-opener for many volunteers.

Another major challenge for volunteers is language. Although JICA and PC volunteers receive roughly three months of Nepali language training,

in many cases this is not enough. JICA volunteer, Miwako Fujii says that although she likes Nepali and it helps that she knows a lot, it is often not enough. There are situations when she just does not have the technical vocabulary to understand or just needs the community member she is speaking with to speak more slowly. For VSO volunteers, their one-week of Nepali language is meant to allow them to get around, but is not emphasized in training. Mike Rosenkrantz admitted that his Nepali is not what it could be, and expressed his desire to learn more on his own, to better communicate with those that do not speak English. Even for those that do have the technical language training, language is always a barrier as cultural differences in the way things are worded or even the things that are unsaid can sometimes be confused. For example, I was eating dinner with PC health volunteer Brandon Hugueley and his host mother as he tried to explain to her the value of eating more colors in one's meal. He pointed to her pile of rice, lentils, and potatoes and said in Nepali that it was not healthy. It appeared that she took it to mean that her food was not good enough, but did not understand that he meant it was okay in moderation. Without the ability to communicate the nutritional value of carbohydrates, sugars, fats, and proteins because of not having that sort of vocabulary and also because his host mother had not ever been exposed to the idea of having a "balanced meal", the message was not communicated. This sort of language barrier can be tough in any situation for volunteers, even when they can speak the language because of different individual practices.

### *Reshaping Strategies*

In the 1960s, volunteers in VSO, JICA, PC, and AA were spread throughout reaching almost all of Nepal's 75 districts. However, with

changing times, restrictions on access and security have prevented organizations from sending their volunteers out into remote areas of the country. Rather than a two to three day walk to their village, volunteers must be within a 24-hour window to reach the safety of Kathmandu. After the Maoist Insurgency in 2006, many international organizations had to shift their focus to ensure the safety and security of their volunteers. VSO's Bhandari explains the challenge of trying to meet the needs of Nepal's poorest communities while also keeping safety of its volunteers a high priority that "cannot be compromised".

During the insurgency, VSO and JICA readjusted their volunteer placement to areas around Pokhara or Kathmandu rather than sending their volunteers out to more remote regions where access in the event of an emergency is not possible. In the case of PC, their withdrawal from Nepal for eight years reflects the high importance of its volunteers' security to the organization. For AA Denmark, joining forces with AA Nepal to achieve better solidarity and to work more with local counterparts was a strategy to ensure the life of the organization in a politically unstable Nepal.

In the past, volunteers with each organization were not assigned a counterpart and many worked alone, enjoying remote areas of Nepal. With changing generations that desire increased connectivity and relationships, volunteers are each assigned a local counterpart in a government office with whom to work. For JICA and PC, volunteers are now encouraged to become part of the community and to really work on their Nepali language to show that they are culturally sensitive yet also to make more meaningful

connections.

## **Emerging Local Organizations**

### *Activista*

The challenges and limitations of international organizations including language, access, and cultural differences represent factors that are possibly symptomatic of being an “outsider”. Local organizations Activista and EngageCorps are utilizing national volunteers to achieve a better, more empowered, aware, and engaged Nepal.

Activista, an international youth training center in Kathmandu emphasizes social activism, and is just one arm of AA’s Global Platform and Activista Network. Its mother agency, AA Denmark traces its roots in Nepal back to 1986 when the focus was mostly on land rights and physical development of infrastructure. Activista, however, uses the philosophy that “youths are not only the leaders of tomorrow; they are the key actors of today” (Activista 2012). Activista runs through the support of a group of about 200 Nepali volunteers, all engaged in social and political issues, learning the ways of campaigning to create change and achieve human rights to health, safety, and food. AA’s Global Citizen course is a three-month course in which half Nepali and half Danish volunteers are trained to be global citizens, analyzing effects of development, globalization, culture, politics, journalism, and communications. In this course, volunteers live and learn at the AA office and volunteer as a means of applying ideas into action. Through service learning, volunteers get hands-on experience working with local NGOs and establish relationships with organizations to better understand what it means to

volunteer in modern Nepal and to just being a global citizen.

Through utilizing youth aged 18-25, Activista aims to empower young people to understand their ability to strengthen their own rights through awareness raising, information, and advocacy. These strategies of self-help, empowerment, and an emphasis on the volunteer's impact reflect growing trends of young organizations throughout Nepal. Suran of AA Nepal's Global Citizen course remarks that "volunteering and interaction is essential to becoming an aware and active global citizen". There is an understanding of the need for community involvement, and for Activista, that requires involving Nepali and Danish youth, working side by side, to understand the complex nature of development in Nepal. They are trained to think critically and reflect on their service, always coming up with ways to make positive changes and utilize their own powers as youth within vulnerable communities.

Challenges they face include working with different communities that have different cultural practices or lifestyles and ensuring participation. For many volunteers, they are also attending university or working a job, so it requires balancing time and commitments. One volunteer remarked that she has passion for volunteerism and social activism, yet she also has her future and her job to worry about. The relationship between Danish and Nepali volunteers appears friendly and positive, yet there are also challenges living and learning together with different ways of doing things. A volunteer commented that these "differing opinions could be challenging, yet they are also so much fun" as they learn so much through cross-cultural exchange and discussion.

## *EngageCorps*

An organized volunteerism course working to promote part time and national volunteerism, EngageCorps emerged two years ago as part of Simone Galiberti's long-term vision for direct service being for everyone, not just for the "usual suspects". Rather than international, full time, experienced, Western volunteers, EngageCorps recruits volunteers of any age, any background, with the willingness and desire to volunteer. The most important part of Engage, Simone says, is ensuring impact. "it's not about just matching a volunteer, but being directly involved with the volunteer and service user (volunteer recipient/partner)". Two generations of volunteers have begun training and serving, either working with people with blindness or those that are in wheelchairs. For many of the service users, their need is in studying for university exams, so the EngageCorps volunteer serves to assist in reading materials and helping prepare for finals, which the organization requires anywhere from two to four hours of service a week. Through weekly feedback and monitoring, EngageCorps wants to ensure the impact and positive relationship that exists between volunteer and service user.

Achieving balance and maintaining flexibility is a challenge as Engage's volunteers are part-time, balancing school, families, and social lives. For Simone, he understands that his volunteers have other priorities and commitments, yet he hopes that each possesses the motivation to truly engage with their service user and be the support that they can be.

## **Discussion/Analysis**

### *Reshaping the Volunteer Landscape*

One organization cannot do it all. There are so many needs to be met and there is much political and social change occurring in Nepal that is reshaping the ways in which development is constructed. No matter which strategy of development is considered “most effective”, different approaches will continue to be tried and tested and more methods will emerge to fill the needs of Nepal.

A major critique of past international development by Nandra R. Shrestha is that “many development projects are usually based on their visibility and status value, not on their real worthiness and public benefits” (1997, 21). While Shrestha’s remark might be true of many cases of development she goes on to notice recent changes in approaches to development. Similarly, my research reveals that there are new strategies and new local organizations emerging to combat the possible diplomatic and Western-dominant models of development. Rather than a “total devaluation of the local modes of life and economies, consequently breeding and nurturing the culture of dependency and dependent development in Nepal” within the development establishment, the need for local involvement is understood (ibid). Top-down approaches are slowly going out of fashion and community-up support is becoming the new way of ensuring sustainability, impact, and real needs being addressed.

In the case of PC, their current volunteers are young and relatively inexperienced technically as compared to other development workers in other sectors, yet they are trained heavily in Nepali language, culture, and customs. This sort of integration into local communities creates a situation in which “outsiders” have the opportunity to see an inside perspective and possibly

become part of their community. Living and learning alongside locals, becoming friends with villagers, and having a community which to call home for two years possibly lends a hand when trying to implement change. Building relationships and establishing trust among locals is emphasized, and can lead to positive relations between volunteer and society.

The caveat however, is that in many instances, these volunteers found their lack of expertise in the form of a certification, Masters Degree, or hands-on experience limited them. Locals wanted to know the volunteers had experience and had proven knowledge that what they want to implement can and does work as is the case with VSO's volunteers and JICA's senior volunteers. In addition, their status as a Westerner and as an American lent all sorts of problems when it came to implementation of change.

On the flip side, a critique of VSO's volunteers is that their little Nepali language training prevents them from being able to communicate directly with locals in the community relying on a translator or requiring communication with those who are English-speaking, thereby only getting the opinions and voices of a certain educated class of Nepali. While the value of English can be an important need for many Nepali people, the question remains if that is the sort of development a volunteer is supposed to be nourishing. Should volunteers be reinforcing a Western dominated society?

It is important to note that limitations do not mean that the volunteers have experienced failure or are unsuccessful in their assignments rather they face more challenges than they might have anticipated. And that is where local organizations step in since these limitations are not quite the same for national volunteers. EngageCorps and Activista are operating under the mentality that

volunteerism is something that should be encouraged by Nepali, for Nepali, to improve their own communities wellbeing. By engaging citizens and educating them about the ways in which they can be powerful and make an impact in their community, these organizations are ideally creating sustainable and long-lasting changes that empower youth who are a part of these communities.

## **Conclusion**

Development through volunteerism is just one small part of a process that involves diverse players in Nepal's development sector. Recognizing that each organization has its limitations allows it to focus its resources and volunteers on specific parts of development. Finding each organization's strength, where each can contribute greatly to Nepal and its people allows the pieces to come together. The international volunteer organizations such as VSO, JICA, AA, and PC that have been working in Nepal for decades have established working relationships with various communities, yet there are challenges they face with implementing projects and ensuring impact that can be found in any development project.

In this research, the intention of volunteers is never in question and is perceived to be sincere, yet that desire to help is not always enough. These good intentions might be better accompanied by years of experience, by technical skills, knowledge of the language, and by an open and willing mind. Going in to long-term volunteer service requires an understanding that relationships must be built but also that their two-years will eventually come to a close.

I have found that volunteers are often limited in their ability to "complete" their assignment due to various factors. Access, security, experience, "outsider" status, language, and cultural differences all limit the volunteer in their scope. It makes development that much more tricky and that much slower when these limitations are in the way.

The rise in national organizations such as EngageCorps and Activista

to fill the gaps that are left by these older agencies shows the understanding, awareness, and connectedness of the development sector. These young NGOs are determining where their national volunteers can fill the gaps and even do a more effective job than international volunteers, working toward a better Nepal.

## Appendices

### 1.1 Missions of International Development Organizations

<b>Peace Corps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Helping the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.</li><li>2. Helping promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served.</li><li>3. Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.</li></ol>
<b>Action Aid</b>	To fight for the rights of those suffering at the hands of injustice and inequality, and give them the strength and power to hope for the future.
<b>JICA</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Addressing the global agenda</li><li>2. Reducing poverty through equitable growth</li><li>3. Improving governance</li><li>4. Achieving human security</li></ol>
<b>VSO</b>	VSO believes that putting people at the heart of development is the only way to make a real difference in the world.

### 1.2 Missions of National Development Organizations

<b>Activista</b>	We want to deepen and widen social justice action by giving young activists from Nepal, Asia and the rest of the world, opportunities to develop their skills in planning actions for social change
<b>EngageCorps</b>	ENGAGE aims at the establishing an inclusive society based on more inclusive, just and equal communities all around Nepal ENGAGE facilitates and supports the creation of meaningful community services experiences for people of all the walks of live, with no differentiation based on creed, belief and economic status.

## List of Acronyms

AA Action Aid

INGO International Non-Governmental Organization

JOCV Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers

JICA Japan International Cooperation Agency

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

PC Peace Corps

VDC Village Development Committee

VSO Volunteer Service Overseas

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