

## **EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS**

### **Impact of Youth Volunteering in Ghana**

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# 1 Introduction

Based at the office of ICYE Ghana, I spent six months researching the phenomenon of 'volunteering' and gained not only an insight into the Ghanaian understanding of voluntary work but also learnt a lot about the various motivations, hopes, expectations, disappointments and achievements of international volunteers and the Ghanaian organisations that decided to host them.

The research process consisted of three phases: From April to June, I collected information about volunteering in the country. This was mostly done by internet research and visits to various organisations that are involved with volunteering. July and August were dedicated to the 'field study' – I visited various projects that host ICYE volunteers and conducted interviews with the volunteers and their Ghanaian colleagues in order to find out about the benefits and challenges of international volunteering. Unfortunately I had to travel back to Germany after 4 months due to health reasons. So I spent the final months of September and October in Germany while analysing the collected data. My final aim was to develop a tool that identifies the pitfalls of volunteering while offering recommendations to possibly meet those challenges.

## ***The Research Process: Tools and Approach***

The development of the country profile had required quite a lot of internet research and various visits to organisations that were either directly involved with volunteers or that had some kind of influence on volunteering in the country. After this rather theoretical process, the action research was a refreshing change.

In order to assess the impact of international volunteering, interviews should have been conducted with the volunteers, their host placements and living situation / host community. The first change occurred in this constellation already: All interviewed volunteers lived on the premises of their projects and all visited projects hosted volunteers within their organisation. So there was no separate environment of 'community' in which the volunteers could be found and therefore I didn't investigate this third realm of 'host community'. The interviews with the volunteers either took place in the office within the framework of their regular evaluation discussion or during distinct visits to their projects. The interviews with the staff were conducted at their respective host placements.

## 2 Overview of Volunteering in Ghana

### ***Relationship of Civil Society Private Sector and State in Ghana***

The lion's share of volunteering in Ghana takes place within the civil society. People volunteer with NGOs, CSOs, within their communities, churches, clubs, etc. The state operates its national voluntary service programme since 2003 with growing numbers of participation. In the private sector, however, voluntary activities are still a rare phenomenon, although the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility<sup>1</sup> (CSR) could provide a means of improving the lives of communities by voluntary actions of employees when carefully planned and accomplished. In Ghana, the full potential of CSR is far from being tapped.

### ***Volunteering overview***

For a better accessible overview it might be useful to distinguish different levels and types of voluntary activities.

Government	Bilateral agreements (International volunteers) National Service Scheme & National Voluntary Programme (National volunteers)
Civil society	NGOs (organising / working with volunteers)
Private sector	Corporate Social Responsibility

Indeed, in traditional Akan culture, there is an institution called *nnoboa* (boa = to help). The term *nnoboa* describes a form of communal labour that usually once a week on Saturdays brings together all the members of the community to work together on a voluntary basis. In the villages it is still common to have *nnoboa*, but the modern individualistic city lifestyle makes many Ghanaians fear that their society might lose their traditionally positive attitude towards volunteering.

The National Service Scheme may be seen as a way to preserve that spirit of serving the society. The Ghana National Service Scheme (NSS) is a mandatory program that exists since 1973 and requires newly graduated Ghanaians to serve their country for the period of one year. Qualified youth are mainly deployed in the fields of education, health, agriculture and local government. About 60% of the National Service personnel are posted on placements in the education sector where they teach at all levels in all subjects of shortfalls to balance the teacher shortage, especially in rural areas.

Civil society level displays another variety of volunteering. People engage in various forms of voluntary activities, e.g. in different functions at their churches and communities, often without regarding these activities as a distinct form of volunteering (e.g. Sunday School teachers). Apart from that, it is mainly NGOs that promote volunteering and/or that work with volunteers. Despite the good work of some NGOs, there are also many critical voices that demand caution and warn against the numerous organisations that are only established to use the less privileged they claim to represent and support to get funds from donors for their own monetary benefit. Especially orphanages seem to experience an ongoing boom in Ghana and there are annoyed opinions that closely connect the (international) voluntary sector to this moneymaking business, since after all, it is international volunteers that contribute a lot of money to these organisations they work with for a few weeks.

*The Coalition of Voluntary Organisations in Ghana (COVOG)* is an umbrella organisation that brings together about 50 Ghanaian organisations that are involved with volunteering.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition: 'CSR is a "concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (European Commission). It refers to responsible corporate action beyond legal requirements; CSR manifests itself throughout the value chain, in a company's treatment of its employees and in its dealings with the relevant stakeholders.' (Bertelsmann-Stiftung, 2009).

## International Volunteering in Ghana

The extent of international volunteering in the country is impossible to measure – but it is *huge*. Ghana has attracted international development funds for decades and could be called the ‘darling’ of international cooperation in West Africa. Apart from the bigger international volunteer agencies there are myriads of small scale NGOs and companies from all corners of the world that operate volunteer placements in Ghana. No matter the single motivations within the wide range of offers (from intercultural learning experience to ‘meaningful’ adventure travelling), volunteering in Ghana is a big business. As the involved companies and organisations operate in competition with each other, there are no aspirations for networking in any form and hence, there is no umbrella organisation that could provide an overview of the landscape of international volunteering in the country.

Easier to access are the bigger international volunteer agencies operating in Ghana. These include the United Nations Volunteers (UNV), the British-based Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), the US-American Peace Corps and the German programme ‘Weltwärts’, just to mention a few.

## 3 Action Research

### 3.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS’ INPUTS

#### 3.1.1 General Information about Volunteers

The group of volunteers who were interviewed for this survey consists of 8 short-term and 5 long-term volunteers. The short-term volunteers stayed in Ghana for a varying period of 3 weeks up to 4 months, while the long-term volunteers were staying for one year and were interviewed towards the end of their stay. Since ICYE’s target group is typically young people, most incoming participants are about 20 years old. This is a convenient age as the majority of volunteers have completed high school at this stage and finally have some free time to discover another part of the world.

#### **At a glance – Volunteer’s profile:**

Male	6
Female	7
Age	From 18 to 31. Average 20 years
Marital status	Single
Education	High School Diploma

#### **Previous experience**

Yes	1	Yes	1
No	7	No	4

For most of the interviewed volunteers, this **current voluntary service was the first** they participated in. Only two persons have volunteered internationally before, for a period of two weeks respectively. While their educational background seems quite homogeneous, the only exception is one Ph.D. amongst high school diplomas, the volunteer’s daily environment and association with other people differs. In their **daily life at home**, most volunteers have either not much or nothing to do with people with physical challenges. People from a different ethnicity and a different socio-economic background do not play a role in half of volunteer’s lives, while the remaining half splits and has either a lot or nothing to do with these groups. Most interviewees also do not have a lot to do with individuals of different political orientations and different religious beliefs. Despite individual differences, the picture suggests that the average volunteer might not have much experience in dealing with people of another background and/or beliefs.

### 3.1.2 Motivation

	Not often	Neither/No r	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> I had a desire to participate in volunteering as a way to reduce social or economic inequality.	1	4	3	-	5	-
<b>B</b> I thought that the volunteer experience would give me skills useful in school or in a job.	2	1	5	1	4	-
<b>C</b> I had a desire to make a difference by helping others.	1	1	6	-	-	5
<b>D</b> I needed a job.	8	-	-	5	-	-
<b>E</b> A friend or co-worker was involved with the organization.	6	2	-	5	-	-
<b>F</b> I was asked by a school or organization.	8	-	-	5	-	-
<b>G</b> I was required to volunteer as part of a course requirement.	8	-	-	5	-	-
<b>H</b> I wanted to make friends and meet people.	3	2	3	-	3	2
<b>I</b> I wanted to gain greater cross-cultural understanding.	-	1	7	-	1	4
<b>J</b> I wanted to travel or live abroad.	-	3	5	-	3	2
<b>K</b> I wanted to gain international experience and language skills.	-	5	3	-	3	2
<b>L</b> I wanted to have a challenging and meaningful experience.	-	1	7	-	1	4

The **motivation** to volunteer in another country is huge and manifold. The main reasons (11 out of 13 agree) for volunteering abroad are:

1. To gain greater cross-cultural understanding,
2. To have a challenging and meaningful experience
3. To help others.

Furthermore, volunteering is seen as a (cheap) way to travel and live abroad and is thus an opportunity to gain international experience and language skills that might be useful in a job. Meeting people and making friends might be considered a nice side effect of volunteering.

### 3.1.3 Activities and Impact Areas

	Ineffective	Neither/Nor	Effective	Ineffective	Neither/ Nor	Effective
<b>A</b> Providing universal primary education	-	5	3	-	3	-
<b>B</b> Tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults	-	3	4	1	1	3
<b>C</b> Helping community members learn to read, speak, write or understand English or another foreign language	-	2	3	-	1	-
<b>D</b> Providing economic and social opportunities for youth	-	3	-	-	2	2
<b>E</b> Caring for infants and/or children in a day-care facility	-	2	4	2	-	1
<b>F</b> Promoting environmental sustainability				-	-	2

<b>G</b> Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria or other infectious diseases				-	1	-
<b>H</b> Providing assistance for the elderly	-	-	1			
<b>I</b> Providing physical therapy or other assistance to physically challenged people	-	-	1			
<b>J</b> Building or providing housing	-	1	-			
<b>K</b> Collecting, preparing, or distributing, food, crafts, or other goods	1	-	-			

#### Which activities helped you most in learning?

- I learnt how to handle children.
- Teaching: I learnt a lot about children and myself.
- In general watching the kid's development during the period of my stay.
- Taking care of kids.
- Teaching interesting topics to the children.
- Communicating with the teachers. Discovering the country.

Most of ICYE Ghana's international volunteers work with children and youth. They fulfil various tasks but are often uncertain about the **effectiveness** of their work. Almost all volunteers are involved in teaching at the primary level and they rate their impact as moderate. More respondents agree that they have a great impact on children and youth in tutoring or teaching them outside the classroom. Only a few specify that they also help community members to read, speak, write or understand English or another foreign language with moderate or good success. Providing economic and social opportunities for youth is connected to many volunteer's tasks but they rate themselves as not too effective in this area. They have more confidence in their positive impact when it comes to caring for infants and children in day-care facilities. Only 2 out of 9 feel they are not effective at this task. There are more individual activities that individual volunteers perform (e.g. creating environmental awareness) and most times, they feel pretty useful. Some of the long-term volunteers also invented personal projects that really improved the living and/or learning environment of their schools, e.g. building a school library. All volunteers reinforce that their daily deeds helped them to learn, especially organising and teaching activities.

### 3.1.4 Training / Institutional Support

Thinking about your international volunteer experience, please indicate how much preparation and support you received from your **project and sending organisation** in the following areas.

	Not often	Neither/Nor	Very often	Not often	Neither/ Nor	Very often
<b>A</b> I received thorough training on the host culture.	1	7	-	-	3	2
<b>B</b> I received thorough training on my volunteer duties at the project.	5	3	-	2	-	3
<b>C</b> Sending organisation supported me well before and throughout my volunteer placement.	3	3	2	-	-	5
<b>D</b> Local staff at my placement supported me well throughout my volunteer service.	1	5	2	2	1	2
<b>E</b> I was trained through everyday tasks (Learning by doing).	2	1	5	-	1	4

Feedback on **institutional support** turns out quite differently from short-term and long-term volunteers:

- *Thorough training on host culture* was not really given to short-term volunteers, whereas long-term were content with the amount of training they received
- *Training on volunteer duties* was non-existent for most short-term and a few long-term volunteers, but other long-term were again very content with their preparation before and throughout placement perfect for all long-term volunteers, but rather disappointing for short-term who often complain about decreasing interest after departure
- *Support of sending organisation* was okay or even pretty good for both short- and long-term volunteers
- *Support of colleagues at project* was the most common and suitable option for all volunteers.
- *Learning by doing*

Many volunteers wish they had received more information on Ghana and its culture before their departure. This should either be considered by sending organisations or explained why it is not done. In the meantime or as a possible solution, ICYE Ghana has developed a more detailed information sheet with practical tips for preparation and behaviour, which they now send to short-term volunteers prior their arrival. Sending organisations should also stay in touch with their volunteers during their service in order to let them know they are still interested in them.

### Support from ICYE Ghana

	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often	Not often	Neither/No r	Very often
<b>A</b> ICYE Ghana provides immediate and satisfying support when I get in touch with them.	-	3	5	2	2	1
<b>B</b> I feel I can turn to them anytime in case any problems arise.	-	1	7	3	1	1
<b>C</b> I can see that the host organization and the community have a good communication.	5	1	2	3	2	-
<b>D</b> I think my hosts knew a lot about me before I came.	6	2	-	5	-	-

The hosting organisation, ICYE Ghana, also receives divided feedback:

- *They provide immediate and satisfying support when I get in touch with them* most short-term volunteers agree. Long-term volunteers however disagree and doubt speed and quality of the support.
- *I feel I can turn to them anytime in case any problems arise* 7 of 8 short-term volunteers agree, while 3 of 5 long-term disagree.
- *I can see that ICYE and the community have a good communication.* is confirmed by only 2 short-term volunteers but all others doubt that.
- *I think my hosts knew a lot about me before I came.* is disapproved by everyone.

There is a clear gap between short-term and long-term volunteers concerning their satisfaction with ICYE Ghana's support. While short-term volunteers feel confident to turn to ICYE Ghana when they are in trouble, the long-term volunteers show lots more objections. One of those doubting volunteers explains: '*Annie really tried. She visited us 4 times/year. She's good. We are okay [with the support], but we know of all the stories of other volunteers who were not happy with the support, so if we had a real problem, we don't know if we would turn to ICYE first*'. Both short-term and long-term volunteers feel that there is not a good or frequent communication between ICYE staff and host communities. This might explain why the hosts don't seem to know a lot about their new volunteers when they arrive. Communication hindrances within ICYE Ghana as well as with volunteers and and host projects

have been identified and sought to be improved by now. Better training of project heads might be useful but will undoubtedly take some time to be fruitful. Maybe it would help if volunteers were already prepared by their sending organisation that communication lines can be different in other societies and that they should not expect everyone to deal with issues as they are used to in their home country.

### 3.1.5 Cultural Immersion

	Yes	No	Yes	No
<b>A</b> I served alone in my placement (without other volunteers).	1	7		5
<b>B</b> I served in a group with another/other local volunteer(s).		7	1	5
<b>C</b> I served in a group with another/other international volunteer(s).	7	1	5	
<b>D</b> I lived with a host family in the community.		7	1 (in project)	5
<b>E</b> I lived together with other volunteers.	7	1	5	

All interviewed volunteers live at their projects, there are no host families. Only one out of 13 volunteers served alone in her project, while all the others served in a group with other international volunteers. In general, there are no complaints about the **living arrangements** and actually all volunteers like the fact that they have a fellow with them.

### 3.1.6 General Impact

	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> I had a specific skill needed by the host project.	3	2	3	1	3	1
<b>B</b> I transferred useful skills to the host project.	3	3	2	2	1	2
<b>C</b> I made a lasting contribution to the project or community members.	2	1	5	1	-	4
<b>D</b> I provided money or other physical resources to the host project or community members.	2	1	5	-	1	4
<b>E</b> My services could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member.	1	4	3	5	-	-
<b>F</b> If I had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services.	7	1	-	4	-	1
<b>G</b> My presence in the community may have caused some problems.	8	-	-	1	4	-

Only a third of all volunteers feel that they have a specific skill needed by their host projects. The remaining respondents are not so certain of their proficiency, which confirms the notion of their assisting role. Still a third of volunteers are convinced they transferred useful skills to their projects. No matter if skilled or unskilled, most volunteers (9 of 13) are proud and certain to have made a lasting contribution to the project or community members. They also agree that they often provided money or other physical resources. These were usually products of daily need, e.g. diapers, washing powder, slippers, medicine. Many volunteers also brought some toys along when they came. There are also cases where volunteers organised some fund-raising in their home country and generated huge amounts of money in order to build something in their project (e.g. 1800 Euro to build a library). Regarding the effectiveness of their work, short-term volunteers think that full-time staff members could have been a bit more or equally effective, while long-term volunteers disagree with that. All volunteers (11 of 13) however doubt that a local staff member *would* have provided these services. This may lead to the conclusion that many projects rely on volunteers without whom they couldn't run

their daily activities properly. Although this might not be the perfect framework for the ‘assisting’ role, volunteers are in general very happy when they have enough to do and see that their work is needed.

### 3.1.7 Community Engagement

	Not often	Neither/No r	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> I am very interested in being a part of my host community.	1	2	5	1	2	2
<b>B</b> I feel I have the ability to make a difference in my host community.	3	5	-	3	-	2
<b>C</b> I try to find the time to make a positive difference in my host community.	3	1	4	1	2	2
<b>D</b> I am highly interested in volunteering.	1	2	5	-	3	2
<b>E</b> I am very interested in joining local groups, projects or clubs.	4	-	4	3	2	-

The levels of **community engagement** are neither high nor low. In general, volunteers are interested in their surroundings but still focus on their work. Most volunteers would like to be a part of their community but they don’t think that they have the ability to make a positive difference there. The majority is not so much interested in joining local groups, projects or clubs but one has to admit that there are not too many opportunities. Many volunteers, both short- and long-term, don’t feel integrated in their community. Even if they feel familiar with the people and surroundings, they are constantly reminded that they are different. A common complaint is: *‘We are always seen as the white man. It’s about your money, but not about your person’*. At the same time, volunteers also appreciate the *‘small moments, the familiarity with everyone’*. As one puts it: *‘Yes, I feel integrated somehow. Maybe medium. I am still a stranger but at the same time I share the everyday life’*.

### 3.1.8 Reflection and Dialogue

	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> I spoke with host community members often about my experiences.	1	5	2	2	2	1
<b>B</b> I spoke with other volunteers often about my experiences.	-	1	7	-	-	5
<b>C</b> I met with project staff often to discuss my experiences.	4	2	2	3	2	-
<b>D</b> I wrote in a journal, emailed, or blogged often about my experiences.	2	1	5	-	3	2
<b>E</b> I reflected often on the new experiences I encountered while volunteering.	-	4	4	-	-	5

**Please give details about possible problems in the interaction with the local community and Reflection and dialogue** about the experiences are important to all volunteers. The exchange with other volunteers is the most significant medium to them. To a lesser extent they also talk with host community members about their experiences, but seldom with project staff. Some volunteers also write in a journal, email or blog. All volunteers reflect from time to time on the new experiences they encounter while volunteering.

### 3.1.9 Contact Reciprocity

	Not often	Neither/No r	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> Local staff and I shared very similar goals.	2	1	5	2	2	1
<b>B</b> The activities I performed matched local priorities.	-	2	6	1	2	2
<b>C</b> I strongly believe the community requested and wanted my services.	1	-	7	3	-	2
<b>D</b> Community members and I were of equal social status.	6	1	1	4	-	1
<b>E</b> I sometimes felt that community members and I were in competition.	8	-	-	4	-	1

**If you had problem with these topics, please give more details and indicate how you dealt with them:**

- We were often asked for money and things, e.g. to buy bread.
- There was not much contact between the staff and volunteers. I think it is discouraged from management. And you cannot really change anything in the project, there are too many staff and too few volunteers. But in general there are too less teachers and they need the volunteers.
- I was useful as a French teacher, but they could have done without me.
- 2: My work is not appreciated, at least they don't show it to me at all. That's very bad for the motivation and makes it very difficult for me.

When it comes to **reciprocity** with local staff, not all volunteers are convinced that they share similar goals with their local colleagues. At least they think that the activities they perform match local priorities. While short-term volunteers strongly believe that the communities requested and wanted their services, long-term volunteers doubt that. Most volunteers recognized that they were not of equal social status with community members. They didn't feel that there was competitiveness with community members.

### 3.1.10 Language Ability (English)

	Short-term	Long-Term
Able to communicate only in a very limited capacity		
Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements		
Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements	1	1
Able to speak with sufficient grammatical accuracy and vocabulary to discuss relevant professional areas	3	
Able to speak fluently and accurately in all situations	3	4
Proficiency equivalent to that of an educated (university) native speaker	1	

The volunteers' **language abilities** are quite sufficient in most cases. Still, this is an important criterion that can determine a volunteer's efficiency at work as they are mostly involved in teaching activities. Volunteers feel more useful when they are able to communicate in a comprehensive manner. It is very rare that volunteer's learn a great deal of any of the local languages. Twi is the most wide-spoken language in Ghana and most volunteers learn a few basics, like greetings. However, seldom enough do they require the knowledge to have a real conversation.

### 3.1.11 Overall Perceptions of Change

	Not often	Neither/Nor	Very often	Not often	Neither/N or	Very often
<b>A</b> It affected my ethnic, faith or religious identity.	3	5	-	2	1	2
<b>B</b> It greatly increased my appreciation of other peoples' cultures.	-	2	6	-	3	2
<b>C</b> It increased my participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities.	-	5	3	1	4	-
<b>D</b> It exposed me to communities different from the one(s) that I grew up in.	-	-	8	-	-	5
<b>E</b> I was exposed to new ideas and ways of seeing the world.	-	2	6	-	1	4
<b>F</b> I gained a better understanding of the community where I worked.	-	2	6	-	1	4
<b>G</b> It improved my chances of finding a job.	2	4	2	-	2	3
<b>H</b> It improved my performance on the job.	2	2	4	-	5	-
<b>I</b> It encouraged me to make positive career changes.	2	5	1	-	2	3
<b>J</b> It challenged my previous beliefs or assumptions about my home country.	-	3	5	-	2	3
<b>K</b> When I go back home, I want to join efforts to promote social or economic development.	-	2	6	2	1	2
<b>L</b> I sometimes feel guilty when considering my privilege.	-	3	5	2	1	2
<b>M</b> Overall, I am highly satisfied with my volunteer experience so far.	-	-	8	-	1	4
<b>N</b> It has been a "transformational experience" (one that results in significant changes in my life that probably would not have occurred if I had not participated in volunteering).	-	4	4	-	3	2

Volunteering often leads to an increased self-awareness and to a change of attitudes. Most volunteers agree that they **changed** in some ways **by this experience**. All volunteers agree that during their stay in Ghana they were exposed to communities different to those they grew up in. This made most of them develop a greatly increased appreciation of other peoples' cultures. Although the experience didn't necessarily affect the volunteers' ethnic, faith or religious identity (5 disagree, 6 are uncertain), it did expose them to new ideas and ways of seeing the world (10 of 13). They definitely gained a better understanding of the communities where they worked (10 of 13). Participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities neither increased nor decreased for most respondents during their stay in Ghana, although 8 of 13 are certain that they would join efforts to promote social or economic development when they return home. More than half confirm that their previous beliefs or assumptions about their home countries have been challenged. Most volunteers are aware of their privilege, and many of them feel guilty about it sometimes. Voluntary service doesn't seem to have a huge impact on the professional career of the respondents. Only a few (4 of 13) confirm that it encouraged them to make positive career changes. Whether the service improved their chances of finding a job and performing better on the job is not seen as relevant by half of the volunteers. The stay in Ghana has been a 'transformational experience' for half of the respondents, while the other half is uncertain about this statement. In what ways have the volunteers changed during their time in Ghana? Here's a small insight:

- *'The biggest thing for me is that I got more patience (I am very stressed in Sweden but here you have to be relaxed). I have a new view about Ghana (economic cooperation have to start*

*from within a country and not from outside). I will appreciate my situation very much and will try to keep this feeling as long as possible.'*

- *'I didn't know I was so rich.'*
- *'More grateful for the small things. Everything is so easy for us, we have everything.'*
- *'The way of thinking and looking at things. How I see myself, I have another self-confidence and self-awareness now. The experience makes you stronger: there are coincidences, luck, fortune, meeting certain people etc. And plans for the future just develop.'*

Despite all positive and negative criticism, all volunteers have been highly satisfied with their voluntary experience so far. This is good feedback but ICYE should of course not stop to seek improvements.

## **Final Comments and Suggestions**

### **To ICYE**

- *I think more people would be interested in volunteering if they would have more information about volunteering. And you as organisation tell the truth about volunteering. Don't just tell the positive things, also the negative.*
- *Improve pre-departure information.*
- *I don't really believe in voluntary work. You can't change a country, you learn. It's more important to do it the other way around (let Ghanaian teachers go to Sweden).*
- *It's a pity that so few Africans have the chance to go and see Europe. This would be so useful.*

### **To ICYE Ghana**

- *A better 'casting' of host families and projects. Better preparation for them.*
- *There will always be problems in human interaction. But one could improve the capacities of conflict management.*
- *Make finances more transparent. And better communication within ICYE. Better preparation of projects.*

## **3.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS' INPUTS**

### **3.2.1 General Information about Host Organizations**

9 persons of 4 organisations participated in the questionnaire:

- John Williams Montessori School (Long Term)**
- Apostles International School (Long Term)**
- Royal Seed Needy Home (Short Term)**
- Grace Masak Basic School and Home (Short Term)**

- **Project Work Area**

What is your organization's primary mission, issue, or area of focus?

- To give best of education to the people of the town, give scholarships to the most brilliant ones**
- Education of children**
- To provide for needy children, food, shelter, education.**
- Give shelter for needy children (abandoned, single parents, orphans), give them education and moral support.**

All organisations that ICYE Ghana currently cooperates with address children and/or youth. All volunteers who come to Ghana, long-term as well as short term, are placed in the **education and/or day-care sector**. They work in orphanages and schools, and so I selected two schools and two orphanages in order to represent the rest. Nine persons were interviewed.

- **Previous Experience**

In what year did your organization begin hosting international volunteers and how many international volunteers did you receive then?

- a) 1998: 2 volunteers
- b) 2008: 1 volunteer from Niger
- c) 2007: 2 volunteers
- d) 2008: 2 volunteers

In contrast to John Williams and Apostles School which host exclusively ICYE volunteers for the period of one year, the two homes cooperate with other organisations as well and have volunteers from two weeks up to three months. Although they receive volunteers throughout the year, both mentioned that there are 'seasons' of volunteers - June, July and August - during which a much larger number applies.

### 3.2.2 Motivation

Why did your organization decide to host international volunteers?

- a) We want them to help our children in the school.
- b) Apostles Foundation Ministries (NGO) founded the school. Later they decided to have volunteers to help. They are supposed to be of assistance. We are a needy school, that means it is a school for the vulnerable. Many children come from poor homes and don't pay school fees.
- c) Volunteers are helping, they give hands. They supplement workers. We have about 70 children and we need a certain number of caretakers for them for the Social Welfare. Our staff wouldn't suffice so we need the volunteers as workers to register them with the Social Welfare.
- d) First, we just had normal workers but in times of hardship it is difficult to keep things running. But we need people who take care of the children. That's why we invited volunteers to assist.

The **motivation to host volunteers** is quite similar in all cases. Volunteers are supposed to assist - they are expected to support and supplement the regular staff in taking care of the kids. A slight difference might be that the schools appreciate the volunteer's contribution in terms of their additional teaching skills, while the economic aspect of volunteers as unpaid caretakers plays a more important role in the orphanages. Indeed, both homes seem to depend on the constant support of short-term volunteers who bring not only their workforce but also money and other physical resources along.

### 3.2.3 Requirements

Do you have any requirements for accepting an international volunteer?

Yes, in most cases, international volunteers must. . .

...have specific skills (for example, they must be qualified to provide medical care)	
... have a certain level of education	
... be of a certain age	
...be able to speak one or more local languages	
...submit an application to volunteer with us	
...complete an interview to volunteer with us	
...be qualified in some other way (please specify below).	
We do not have any requirements for our international volunteers	A B C D

a) Requirements like age, education etc are laid down by ICYE already. So actually, there are no other requirements or restrictions. However it would be useful to specify certain skills in the future, in order to make sure that the achievements of the current volunteers (library, carpentry) are continued. So we want ICYE now to send us volunteers with those and other needed skills. E.g. ICT skills to improve our ICT material and teaching.

b) We actually need some skills, like ICT knowledge. Volunteers must be able to handle little children and they should have love for the kids. Volunteers should help us develop the school. They should have good knowledge of the English language. They ought to have creative ideas for leisure activities for the kids.

c) The young volunteers are difficult to handle, but we manage [they have even 15 year-olds].

d) We do not have any requirements for our international volunteers. Everyone can be of help. If you don't have any skills, you can still fetch water... Everyone can do something.

None of the interviewed projects has any specific **requirements** for their volunteers. Certain conditions like age limits, education and interest in the work with children are 'guaranteed' by ICYE already. When asking further however, it becomes obvious that additional skills of volunteers would be indeed useful and needed, e.g. ICT knowledge or interest in library management. Good knowledge of the English language is deemed very central by all projects, and especially in teaching activities irreplaceable, which however plays little role in ICYE's selection of volunteers. These preferable requirements are not (yet) clearly communicated to ICYE.

How long do international volunteers serve with your organization?

	Rarely never	or Occasionall y	Almost always
2 weeks or less	Never x	x	
Between 2 weeks and 1 month	Never	xx	
1 to 3 months	Never		xx
3 to 6 months		x x	
6 to 12 months	Rarely		1 year 1 year
Over 1 year	Never		

b) in a 3 months period you can't finish what you have started. But 1 year is a very good period.

d) Longest 6 months, shortest 2 weeks. Most times an average.

### 3.2.4 Training / Institutional Support

How are international volunteers managed at your organization? Do you...

	Rarely never	or Occasionall y	Almost always
... provide one staff person to organize the international volunteers?			X
... provide several staff people to organize the international volunteers?	x	x	x
... have one or more volunteers who manage international volunteers?	x		
Or do the international volunteers manage themselves?	x		x

b) we have a committee, and they take care of the volunteers

c) we have 2 contact persons for the volunteers

Does your organization offer training to international volunteers (e.g. on their duties, on Ghanaian culture)?

- a) No. There is a preparation camp by ICYE. Apart from that, we actually don't do anything special with them.
- b) We brief them about the history of the school and the aims and activities. During the first weeks, most of the teachers take them round and show them everything.
- c) A lot. We show them how to carry a baby on the back, how to carry water, they learn how to feed a baby, how to cook etc.
- d) They can learn a lot if they want. The volunteers stay in the vocational center that is attached to the orphanage. They could learn how to cook or to sew there.

Volunteers are mostly **managed** by one or two regular workers, whereas the **training** and support they receive by them differs. While the John Williams School states that they don't train the volunteers in any way, the Apostles School briefs them about the school's history, its aims and activities. In the Royal Seed Home, volunteers are shown how to carry a baby on the back, how to carry water, how to feed a baby, how to cook, etc. Volunteers of the Grace Masak Home stay in the premises of a vocational centre that is attached to the home, where interested ones could participate in cooking or sewing activities. Training or discussions on the role and responsibilities of the volunteer do not take place at any of these projects.

### 3.2.5 Activities and Impact Areas

What are the most common types of activities done by your international volunteers? How effective/ineffective?

	Not applicable (0)	Very Ineffective (1)	(2)	(3)	Neither (4)	(5)	(6)	Very Effective (7)
Providing universal primary education					X		X	
Tutoring or teaching children, youth, or adults					X	X		X
Caring for infants and/or children in a daycare facility					X	X	X	

The **activities** performed depend largely on the skills and interests of the respective volunteer. Short-term volunteers usually support ongoing activities of daily life, especially caring and teaching. The same applies for long-term volunteers, who however also have the additional chance of implementing their own 'projects', for example, the development and management of a school library. This kind of 'bigger' achievement naturally requires a longer stay. The **effectiveness** of volunteers in their daily activities of teaching and caring depends on the individual volunteer, all interviewees agree. Many volunteers are very good, for instance talented in teaching, and then their contribution is highly valued while other volunteers are felt not to be too effective. However all projects agree that *'the children love them. They are much attached to them'*. Another person adds with much support from his colleagues: *'The volunteers have a different background and we also have a different background. When we meet at a table, we can share ideas and that is very fruitful. Through the volunteers there are positive changes in the school'*. So it is difficult to rate volunteer's effectiveness in general, but at least the bigger picture suggests that it is worthwhile for the projects to have volunteers around.

### 3.2.6 Benefits - Challenges

**What do you think are the potential benefits of hosting international volunteers?**

Do you think that international volunteers:

	Not often	Neither Nor	Very Often
...contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers?	11 %	56 %	33 %
...provide more people to get your work done?	11	33	56

...provide a new viewpoint or perspective?	-	22	78
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures?	-	11	89
...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nation and cultures?	22	22	56
...help you attract local volunteers?	22	56	22
...bring international attention to your work?	22	-	78
...bring credibility to your work?	-	33	67
...are effective?	-	33	67
...help the economy by spending money locally?	22	22	56
...generate revenue for your organization?	11	11	78
...become financial donors?	56	11	33
...become advocates upon return home?	22	22	56
...are inexpensive?	22	33	44
...’s services could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member?	33	22	44
If the person had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services.	33	11	56
...help your organisation develop the relationship with the local community?	-	11	89
...help to intensify networking efforts at national / international level?	33	11	56

More than half of the project representatives agree that volunteers **don't contribute skills that could not be found in local staff** or local volunteers. Only a third says that volunteers do bring additional skills. An Overwhelming 78% of project staff acknowledges that international volunteers bring a **new viewpoint or perspective** to the workplace. 8 out of 9 persons confirmed that volunteers provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures. A similar question, whether volunteers would also make them **think about their own nation and cultures**, was confirmed by half of respondents, while the other half either disagreed or voted for neither/nor.

International volunteers **don't** seem to be seen as a means to **attract local volunteers**. Most responses were either in the negative or indicating a 'not really'. None of the projects is or has been involved with local volunteers and they obviously don't consider that option at the moment. One has to keep in mind that local/national volunteering 'for volunteering's sake' is uncommon in Ghana. Volunteers bring **international attention** to the respective workplace, 78% agree. The remaining 22% say they don't. So it might depend on individual experiences and may also be due to different perceptions of 'international attention'. All respondents however agreed that volunteers bring **credibility** to their work.

International volunteers are felt to be very **effective** by 6 out of 9, while the remaining 3 suggest that volunteers' effectivity depends on the individual volunteer, their skills and adaptation. But in general, their contributions are appreciated. Whether volunteer's services could have been **more effectively provided by a fulltime staff member** or not seems to depend on the individual experience with volunteers. Slightly more than half of the respondents say that staff members would not have been more effective or that they don't see a difference, while the remaining 44 % say that regular staff would have been more effective. Again it is half-half **whether or not a local staff member would have provided these services** if the person had not volunteered. In almost half of the cases there would

have been no substitute for the volunteer's work. 8 out of 9 respondents agree that international volunteers help their respective organisations develop the **relationship with the local community**.

The majority (78%) thinks that volunteers **create revenue** for their organisation, however only a third states that volunteers become **financial donors**. More than half say that volunteers don't become financial donors, but **advocates** upon return home. The perception whether the volunteers are **expensive** or not, is an interesting one. 44% reply that volunteers are inexpensive, 33% say neither nor, 22% say they are rather expensive. When directly asked whether volunteers are expensive, 78 % disagree with 11% neither nor and 11% affirmative. That highlights the contradiction that projects actually understand the value of a volunteer's work but at the same time keep demanding more money for their upkeep. Money is always an issue, but ICYE Ghana should increase its efforts in explaining the economic value of a volunteer's workforce to the projects and especially brief new projects about it from the beginning.

### What do you think are the potential **challenges** of hosting international volunteers?

Do you think international volunteers:

	Not Often	Neither Nor	Very Often
...require a lot of training?	22 %	22 %	56 %
...require a lot of supervision?	11	11	78
...distract staff and local volunteers from the work?	56	33	11
...are accustomed to different ways of doing things?	22	-	78
...are not always welcome in your community?	78	11	11
...may not have the skills needed?	56	44	-
...may not have the language abilities needed?	56	33	11
...don't stay long enough?	44	11	44
...can be difficult to find?	56	33	22
...take the place of local volunteers?      22 N/A	33	33	11
...take the place of local jobs?	56	22	22
...are not effective?	78	22	-
...are expensive?	78	11	11
...create problems inside the community?	67	22	11

International volunteers require a certain amount of **training**, almost all host projects agree. The extent of necessary training may however vary. While some (5 out of 9) state that volunteers need a lot of training, others say that they don't need much. Most respondents (78%) however share the view that volunteers are **accustomed to different ways of doing things**. As a result, they might either require training and/or subsequent supervision. Indeed 78% agree that volunteers need a lot of **supervision**. 6 respondents say that volunteers don't create **problems in the community**, while 2 say neither/nor and 1 says yes, it might happen.

Also **language abilities** don't seem like a huge hindrance in most cases. Only 1 out of 9 feels that language inability occurs very often and disturbs the performance on the job. **Local volunteering is**

not really established in Ghana. No organisation that ICYE Ghana cooperates with is involved with local volunteering and when asked about the topic, don't seem to be very interested in getting involved with local volunteers. As a result, international volunteers are neither seen as a means to attract local volunteers nor do they take the place of local volunteers.

### **Benefits – Challenges**

To sum up, all interviewed representatives are convinced that international volunteers generally provide more benefits than challenges for their organizations. They find it worthwhile for their organisations to have volunteers around, and their reasoning ranges from 'when the community sees white people in the school, they think they get better education here and send their children to us', to 'they have good ideas and when they see a problem, they often come to you with a solution'. Indeed, it might be 'fifty-fifty, some volunteers make sense, some don't. Volunteers can be very helpful and many things are done by volunteers: financially, physically, sharing ideas'. And finally, someone concludes 'volunteers are very helpful. They will do for you what nobody else will do for you'.

### **3.2.7 Final Comments and Suggestions**

Some suggestions as to how one could maximize the positive impact, or minimize the negative impact of volunteering from host organisations:

c) *It is very good that we have good contact with ICYE. It is very important to be sure that the organisations are there to assist. And we stopped working with some that don't care. But with ICYE the contact is very good.*

d) *Better preparation of the volunteers. In the office, you could tell them:*

- *Let the volunteers understand the home (most of the kids are not orphans, but needy children. That means many of them still have at least one parent, who is however incapable of caring for them. It is very unproductive if a volunteer tells a child 'you are an orphan. You don't have parents').*

- *We have simple food for the kids. For example, we often use soy beans. But please don't complain about that without improving the situation.*

- *be careful with the toys, tidy up after playing,*

## **3.3 COMPARISON VOLUNTEERS' AND HOST ORGANISATIONS' OPINIONS**

**What do volunteers and projects think about...**

	<b>Volunteers</b>	<b>Projects</b>
<b>Training on volunteer's role and responsibilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- was non-existent for most short-term and a few long-term volunteers</li> <li>- most long-term were very content with their preparation in this regard</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- not taking place in any project</li> </ul>
	<p>→ Volunteer's role has to be discussed in more detail with them. Projects should be further encouraged to have introductory sessions with new volunteers and also discuss their responsibilities.</p>	

## Money

- 'We are always seen as the white man. It's about your money, but not about your person'
  - they often provide money or other physical resources, e.g. diapers, washing powder, slippers, medicine.
  - some volunteers organise some fund-raising in their home country and generate huge amounts of money
- White people are perceived as rich, which may cause (1) disappointment for volunteers who don't feel valued as personalities, (2) dependence of organisations on foreign volunteers. There is a need for changing attitudes, but currently the only course of action is to prepare volunteers for this situation.

## Requirements

- Only a third feels that they have a specific skill needed by their host projects.
  - A third of volunteers is convinced they transferred useful skills to their projects.
  - The volunteers' language abilities are quite sufficient in most cases.
- Both homes seem to depend on the constant support of short-term volunteers who bring not only their workforce but also money and other physical resources along.
  - although projects actually understand the value of a volunteer's work, they keep demanding more money for their upkeep
- Volunteers usually seem to have needed skills or skills that can at least be put to any use.
  - None of the interviewed projects has any specific requirements for their volunteers.
  - Additional skills of volunteers would be useful and needed, e.g. ICT knowledge or interest in library management.
  - Only 1 out of 9 feels that language inability occurs very often and disturbs the performance on the job.

→ Since the projects don't state what skills they need, volunteers are placed rather by chance. They usually adapt to the placement but are often not sure if they are useful. Effectiveness and satisfaction will increase for both volunteers and projects when the latter communicates its needs. Then volunteers can apply for those placements where their skills really fit in.

## Effectiveness

- Teaching at primary level: moderate impact.
  - Caring for infants and children in day-care facilities: Only 2 out of 9 feel they are not effective at this task.
- International volunteers are felt to be very effective by 6 out of 9.
  - It depends on the individual. Many volunteers are very good, e.g. talented in teaching, and then their contribution is highly valued while other volunteers are felt not to be too effective.
- Short-term volunteers think that full-time staff members could have been a bit more or equally effective, while long-term volunteers disagree with that.
  - Slightly more than half of respondents say that staff members would not have been more effective or that they don't see a difference, while the remaining 44 % say that regular staff would have been more effective.
- All volunteers (11 of 13) doubt that a local staff member *would* have provided these services.
  - Again it is half-half whether or not a local staff member *would* have provided these services if the person had not volunteered. In almost half of the cases there would have been no substitute for the volunteer's work.

Full-time staff more effective than volunteer?

→ Volunteers are more effective than they think. Of course it depends on their personal talents and adaptation, so this confirms the former result that projects should disclose their requirements. But in general, volunteers' work is not seen much less qualitative than that of full-time staff members. Some projects also seem to rely on the additional work of volunteers without whom they couldn't run their daily activities properly.

## Community

- Many volunteers, both short- and long-term, don't feel integrated in their community.
- Most projects are determined that volunteers are always welcome in their communities. Only 2 respondents say not always.
- Few volunteers acknowledge that their presence could also create problems inside the community. Long-term volunteers are aware that there might be a (low) conflict potential.
- The majority says that volunteers don't create problems in the community, while 2 say neither/nor and 1 says yes, it might happen.

→ Projects are certain that volunteers are usually very welcome in their communities. In general, volunteers don't seem to cause a lot of problems within the communities, although it might happen, especially with volunteers who stay for a longer period. Unfortunately, volunteers often have difficulties to integrate in their new surroundings.

## 4 Conclusions

Volunteering is a worthwhile experience for both the volunteers and the organisations that host them. ICYE participants mainly decide to volunteer in order to get to know another culture while the cooperating Ghanaian organisations are happy about the additional support and new viewpoints brought by the international volunteers. The expectations of volunteers to get to know Ghana by working in its social institutions are usually met. Key to a pleasant stay for the volunteers is however their working environment: Staff in the hosting organisations should be interested in the volunteers and try to integrate them in the daily activities. A clear allocation of roles and responsibilities is as essential as the communication of rules and regulations. This often helps volunteers to settle in quickly and can prevent quite a few misunderstandings. Many projects are however cautious in this regard and don't discuss these topics with their volunteers. Volunteers are seen as guests and direct confrontation about problems is deemed impolite. Projects rather expect ICYE Ghana to prepare volunteers for adaptation. In general, projects are however content with their volunteer's work performance and appreciate their efforts. Nevertheless, more emphasis should be laid on a better preparation of the host projects. It is important that they deeply understand the concept of volunteering in order to avoid a focus on money.

In general, both volunteers and project managers are content with the support they receive from ICYE Ghana. Yet, it is important not to rest on this positive feedback, but to further strengthen this trust through excellent mentoring and assistance. As a final remark to all members and partners of the ICYE federation, I would suggest improving the communication within the organisation. In order to guarantee all participants not only a memorable stay but also a purposeful preparation, a precise communication between sending countries and ICYE Ghana is necessary.

Apart from these technical observations, the ultimate question remains. Is volunteering useful? Does it matter? My conclusion is: Yes, it does. Volunteering in Ghana is an unforgettable experience for those who participate in it because they learn a lot about themselves, about another country and its people and they often start seeing the world from a new perspective. At the same time, volunteering supports organisations that care for children, youth and vulnerable people, and therefore helps to improve the lives of those touched by it. Despite all challenges, the willingness of some people to offer their time and commitment to others remains one of the great chances to make this world a better place. Volunteering is a way of showing youth that not money, but actions and encounters matter most in our lives. Yes, volunteering matters!