

EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Impact of Youth Volunteering in Tanzania

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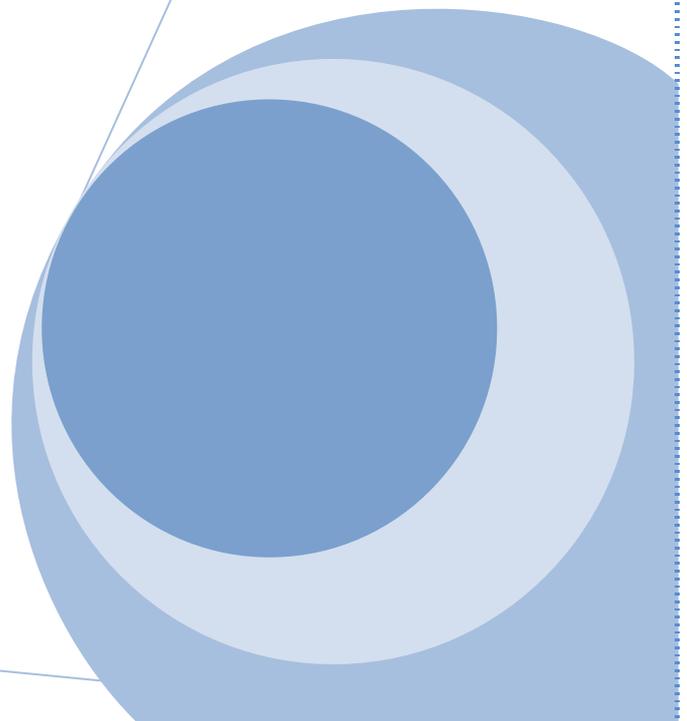
**By Anna Sigridur Sveinbjornsdottir,
Volunteer from Iceland**



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Contents:

1	Introduction	3
2	Overview of Volunteering in Tanzania	3
3	Action Research	4
3.1	Findings of the Research.....	4
3.1.1	<i>Benefits for Volunteers</i>	4
3.1.2	<i>Current Challenges</i>	5
3.1.3	<i>Possible Solutions</i>	5
4	Conclusion.....	6
5	Bibliography.....	6



1 Introduction

Does volunteering really matter?

What would change if nobody would volunteer or the community would decide not to accept volunteers? What is it that volunteers are doing and how do they work? What does it mean to be a volunteer? Why do people decide to be a volunteer?

When you tell people that you are volunteer most people get the idea that you travelled to a foreign country with some organisation and taught English or worked in an orphanage. You don't have to travel far away or join an organisation to be a volunteer. People have many different ideas about volunteering but in the end it is all about helping others by working with them, not for them. When you decide to clean your town on a community day you are volunteering. Volunteers are everywhere, and all of them are trying to reach some aim; fighting for woman rights, education for everybody, animal's right, keep the earth clean, and so on. You might be a volunteer without noticing it, but why are we volunteering and why is it important that we keep on volunteering? People feel good when they can help others, and why not use your skills and do something good for others at the same time? Most of the people I got to know through my volunteering in Mozambique and Tanzania decided to become a volunteer in foreign country because they thought they could use their skills to help others, and learn something new. For them it was great opportunity to get to know the world in a different way; get to know other cultures, people and different way of living and thinking.

A volunteer is a person who works and he/she is not paid. Volunteers aren't paid, not because they are worthless but because they are priceless –Unknown

The Program

I was one of the lucky one that was participating in the project "EYV 2011 - Volunteering Matters". 16 volunteers were based all over the world at the national offices of ICYE members and partners host organizations for 6 months. Here in Tanzania ICYE is working with UVIKIUTA and United Planet, I was hosted at UVIKIUTA. During the time I joined workshops in Mbeya, Zanzibar and Chamazi. I visited work placements like orphanage, schools and tree nursery. I met local people and volunteers from all over the world that shared their ideas and experience.

2 Overview of Volunteering in Tanzania

History of Youth Engagement in Tanzania

Julius Nyerere (the President of Tanzania 1961 – 1985) was one of the people that supported youths and helped them to grow after Tanzania got independence. He made room for youths to grow and be self-reliant. In the last years volunteering has been increasing in Tanzania. In particular, Tanzanian youth have awakened to volunteerism but many things still have to change before it will be common for Tanzanian youths to become volunteers. When the local people hear about volunteering they understand it as a "white thing" but they prefer to use other words for volunteering, like community service. Usually when people are asked if they volunteer the answer is usually no, even if they are participating in many community activities. Youth look at volunteering as a good opportunity to get an informal education, gain work experience and build networks.

For Tanzanians youth it is not so easy to be able to join collage/university or have a job, so it is a good opportunity to use the time to volunteer and through volunteering they are challenged; they gain new knowledge and experience. It is time to empower the local young people in Tanzania, challenge to the government and youth organizations.

But why don't youth volunteer more? The knowledge about volunteerism is really little, some youth don't believe that volunteerism has an impact in general and often it is not easy to get information about volunteer organizations except if you know someone that has been a volunteer or is somehow related to the organization. For international volunteering it usually cost a lot of money and time; people are not ready to take a brake from school or work and for Tanzanian youth it is difficult to get the opportunity to volunteer abroad.

Overview of current volunteering support networks

UVIKIUTA is registered as a nongovernmental organization, non-profit youth development organization in Tanzania. It was established in 1983 and since then receives volunteers from all over the world. Through work camps, exchange programmes and MTV-programme, it tries to provide volunteering services all over the country. UVIKIUTA has been co-operating with Canada World Youth since 2003. Together CIDA, Canada World Youth and UVIKIUTA give young people the opportunity to do exchange volunteering. Youth from Canada, Tanzania, Kenya, South-Africa and Mozambique are doing exchange volunteering, 2 ½ months in one's own country and 2 ½ months in the exchange country. In this way, youth get opportunity to do volunteer service in their country and in a foreigner country. They get the opportunity to experience the world in a different way and work with youth from a different country with different ideas.

The Tanzanian Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) is the largest and oldest standing organization in Tanzanian NGO community. It was founded in 1988 by 22 NGOs. It has grown fast and they now have over 580 member organizations. The main objective of TANGO is to undertake studies and projects on development issues and provide consultancy and training programs for NGOs.

3 Action Research

3.1 Findings of the Research

3.1.1 Benefits for Volunteers

In one way or another the volunteer profits from volunteering, since during and even after the volunteering period the person goes through some changes. Some volunteers see the world with different eyes, discover new things about themselves or have new ideas about their future; every person makes her/his own experience.

During the “International Youth Day” and the workshop, “Volunteerism”, I received some examples of how volunteering has impacted on the lives of participating volunteers. The youth that participated in the workshop were both local and international volunteers. Positive benefits included for example: You get the opportunity to travel, see the ‘real’ situation in the country and at the same time you develop skills like learning a new language. You learn how to work in a group and how to solve different conflicts. You get to know different cultures so you have better understanding of other ways of living – this breaks down stereotypes. You make an international network of contacts and great friendships. People gain self-confidence and it is opportunity for youth to step up. Workshop participants said that they usually receive more from the community than they can give back. Especially when you volunteer for short period, it is almost impossible to have some great impact on the community. They also realized that now they know themselves better. They found that things they thought they couldn't do, they can do quite well because they faced new situations and had to get out of their comfort zones. The big question in the end of the workshop was; “*But should everybody volunteer?*”

“Yes, because we believe it is helpful for the community and it covers the gaps which are left by the government. But it has to be organized effectively and efficiently.”

The self-perception of the volunteers from one of the exchange programmes changed after the programme: *The person I thought I was, I realized I was not that person. I learned to respect others and if everybody would be the same the world would be bored.*

Ben Mongi, UVIKIUTA, says that volunteering is about: *Sharing life and culture. Geography – journey through geography, sharing with others – understanding ourselves. They (volunteers) are not going home as the same person and the people here are not going to be the same as before they came.*

3.1.2 Current Challenges

All programmes face some challenges and so does volunteerism. The international volunteers who come to Tanzania are more likely to face some conflicts than the local volunteers but takes place mostly due to the lack of knowledge about the culture and the language. It is not always easy to follow new rules when you don't understand what they stand for. For example, when you come from a country where you can walk around alone at night it can be difficult in a country where you suddenly have to follow many rules for your own safety.

One of the challenges is the work placement. Are volunteers working for their own benefit or the benefit of the community? Are they in some way harming the community? We can take one of the orphanages as an example. When the same orphanage receives around 20 volunteers every year who only stay from 2 weeks up to 3 months, the children get used to new people coming into their lives all the time, those who they never stop for long. It can be difficult for these children to trust people in the future. Usually it is foreigners that come to work at the orphanages, white people, when they come they bring new clothes, money or new things for the orphanage. Many of them also support some children like to go to school or other important things. But is this all good? The risk is that the orphanages remain depended on the volunteers. Many small communities are depended on foreign people to come and teach, for example, English to their children, build hospitals or paint schools. Often they end up teaching the whole class instead of assisting the teacher.

For some reasons gender inequities are not equal when it comes to volunteerism. In the western world, young women are much more likely to become volunteers than males, for Tanzania it is the opposite. Mostly it is Tanzanian men that apply for exchange programmes and other volunteer jobs. Women are in such short numbers that for some programmes, volunteer organisations have problems finding young women to join the programme. To volunteer at home and volunteer abroad is also not the same for international volunteers and Tanzanian volunteers. Every year Tanzania receives over thousands of volunteers but how many volunteers from Tanzania have the opportunity to volunteer abroad?

Challenges exist also in terms of volunteering policies or lack thereof. There is no formal volunteer policy in Tanzania, no formal system or place to support volunteers, supervise them and evaluate progress made; there is no recourse for frustrated volunteers. For example, do international volunteers have problems to get visas? To get a resident permit in Tanzania requires a lot of work, time and money so most volunteers go on a tourist visa. In Tanzania there are no existing files about how many volunteers come into the country every year, or how many go abroad to volunteer, how they work and how volunteering benefits the community.

3.1.3 Possible Solutions

We face challenges so we can work together to find the solutions. That's why we facing challenges everywhere in life, to improve and get better or so I believe.

With more education about the new culture, country and the language, training from both sending and receiving organisations, the project can be more successful. The volunteers and host communities will not face so many challenges and understanding between them will be better. However, it is not only the volunteer that needs training, the host family and the work placements should also receive some kind of information about the new volunteer, his country and his culture. It is not always easy to come to new country where normal life is completely different from what you know. To come to a new country without any knowledge of the language, culture or other basic information can lead to big culture shock. Receiving language class from your sending organisations and meeting past volunteers can makes things easier and prevent big culture shock. When a volunteer arrives in a new country, he should continue the language class and meet local people he can talk to and share his thoughts with. Every volunteer should have some kind of "contact person", a person who can show the volunteer the neighbourhood and explain situations that might be difficult for the volunteer to understand. With this "contact person" the volunteer will be quicker to get used to the new country and the culture.

The hosting organisations also have to pick the work placement carefully and try to make as little damage in the community as possible; they have to be careful that the community does not get dependent on international volunteers. They have to make sure that the volunteer works with people in the community and not for the community.

If you come to help my, you're loosing your time but if you come because you think that your liberation is linked to mine, then lets work together – Lisa Watson

To encourage volunteerism for both genders possible solutions could be to get the education system involved, universities or collages could give some points for volunteering; people that are learning how to be a nurse or doctor could for example volunteer for some period in a hospital or home for elderly people, teachers could take a part of a year and teach in a school in need. Volunteerism has to get more visible and volunteers should visit schools and share their experience and encourage other youths.

“Volunteerism is a way of living and not just a trip” - (International Youth Day)

4 Conclusion

To be a volunteer is a great experience, school of life. You learn new things; things that you can't learn in school, you share what you know, make new friends and challenge yourself. To be a volunteer is a special thing, something that everybody should do and it should be part of our life. Opportunities are not the same for everybody but as long as we work together and help each other we have the hope that everybody will be equal one day, “One world, one hope”. All great things start with small things, everybody make a difference so let's work together, and together we can make the world to better place for everybody. It is our world, and nobody else but we change it. Keep in mind before you can change the world, you have to change yourself.

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