



ICYE GHANA 

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Impact Assessment of Long-Term International Volunteering Ghana 2014

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Impact Assessment from Host Organisations

The study was conducted with the cooperation of three host organisations in Ghana. The organisations have been working with ICYE and hosting international volunteers since a minimum of two years. The organisations are therefore already familiar with the dynamics, rights and duties of the international volunteers, and the relationship between ICYE Ghana and the projects is considered highly reliable.

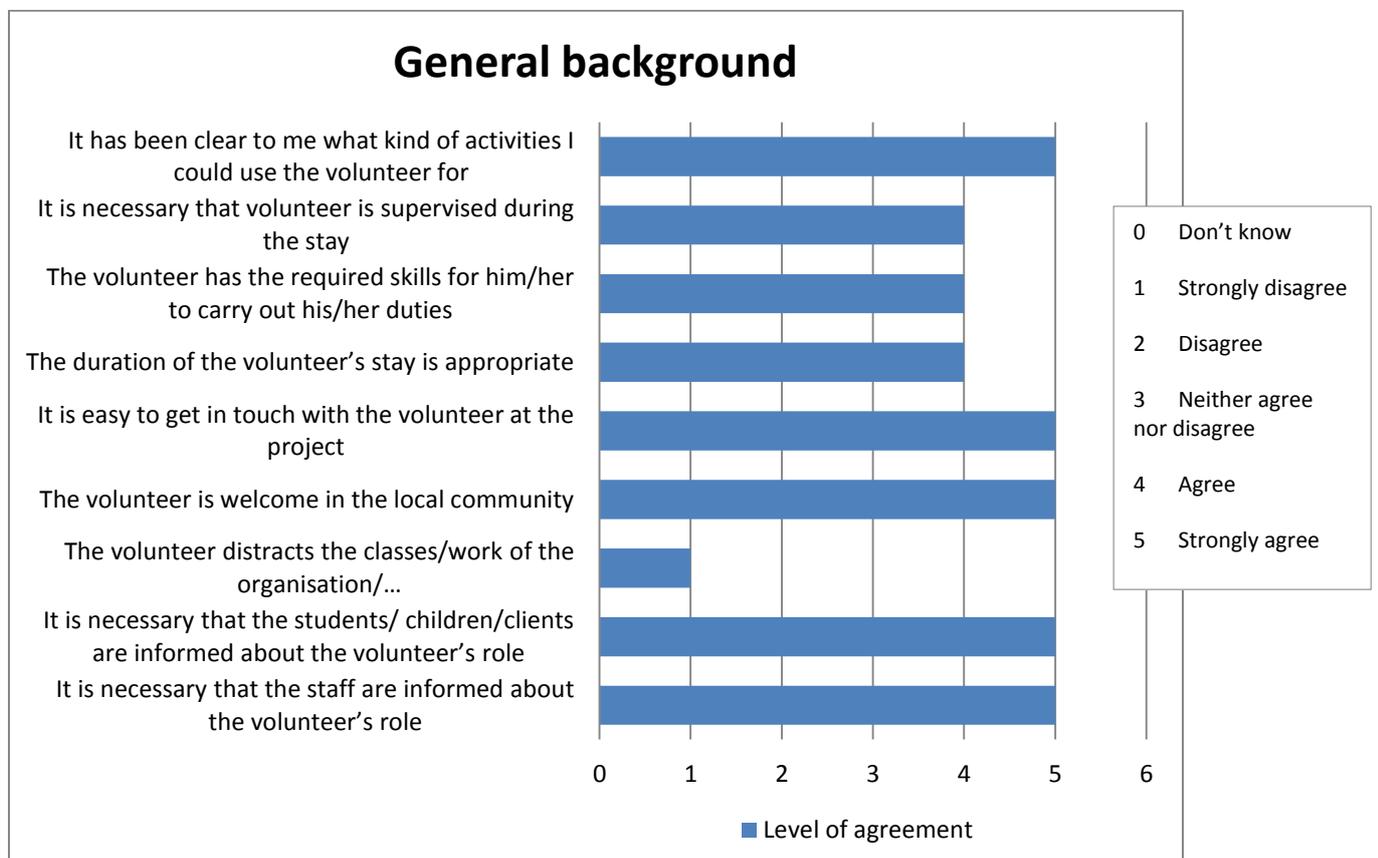
General background

According to the information provided by the questionnaires, all of the organisations stated that they have a manager or contact person in charge of the international volunteers, whose job it is to offer support within the organisation.

The average amount of hours worked by the international volunteers per week differed from organisation to organisation. However, results from two-thirds of the organisations stated that volunteers worked less than 30 hours.

Furthermore, only one of the host organisations said that the manager or contact person spent more than 10 hours with the volunteer. The rest used less than four hours per week. The most regular kind of contact with the volunteers was through private 1 to 1 meetings and/or group meetings as well as in daily work activities.

The majority stated that they spent an appropriate amount of time with the volunteer whereas only one organisation spent more time with the volunteer than they wished to.



As indicated by the responses presented in the table above, one can infer that the role of the international volunteers was clearly understood by all of the organisations. They also agree with the necessity to inform members of staff as well as beneficiaries about the volunteer’s role.

When asked about behaviour and communication with the volunteer, all of them believed that it was easy to get in touch with the volunteer at the project, and they strongly disagree with the statement that the volunteers distracted the classes or the work of the organisations. They also believed that the volunteers were strongly welcomed in most of the communities.

They have different opinions about the duration of the volunteers’ stay and whether the volunteer had the required skills to carry out his/her duties, but in general all the organisations asserted that the benefits of having an international volunteer outweigh the challenges.

“The International volunteer usually establishes a special bond with the younger children, which gives them a sense of belonging and boost their confidence. Their cultural experiences exchanges is invaluable.”

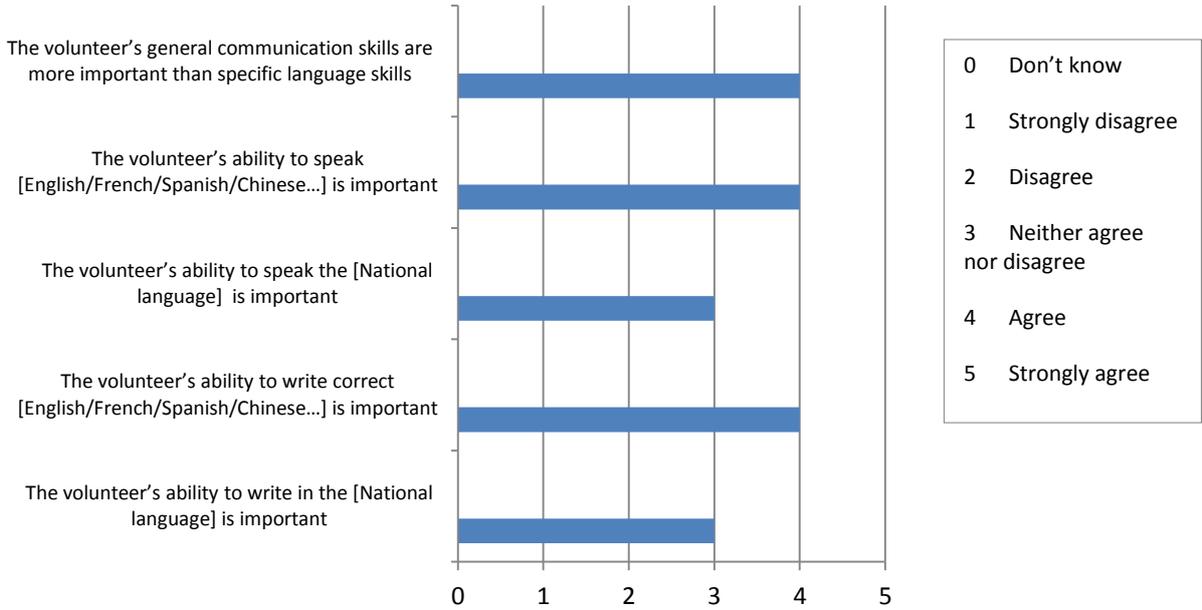
Christ Love Educational Complex

Impact on volunteers

Language skills

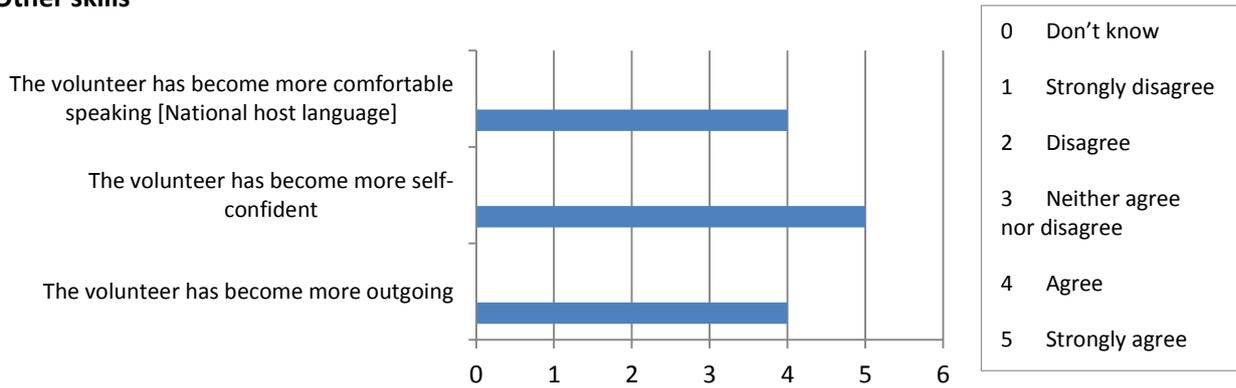
In general, the volunteers had basic language skills upon arrival and good general communication skills (other than language) when they arrived.

Concerning the importance of the international volunteers’ language skills the organisations answered:



All of them believed that the language skills are very important in relation to how the volunteers face the challenges they meet. The ability to speak the national language is on the other hand not decisive; the international volunteers’ language skills improved over the voluntary service period, which enabled the volunteers to take on more challenging tasks.

Other skills



In general, the volunteers improved confidence in being able to express themselves and communicate fluently with the community they worked in.

Impact on Host Organisation

The organisations located in an urban area introduced the volunteer to the local community by including them in activities such as:

- Attending marriages and funeral ceremonies
- Visiting independence parades
- Visiting community churches
- Helping with community communal labour (cleaning exercises)
- Visiting a community radio station to speak of the importance of local volunteering

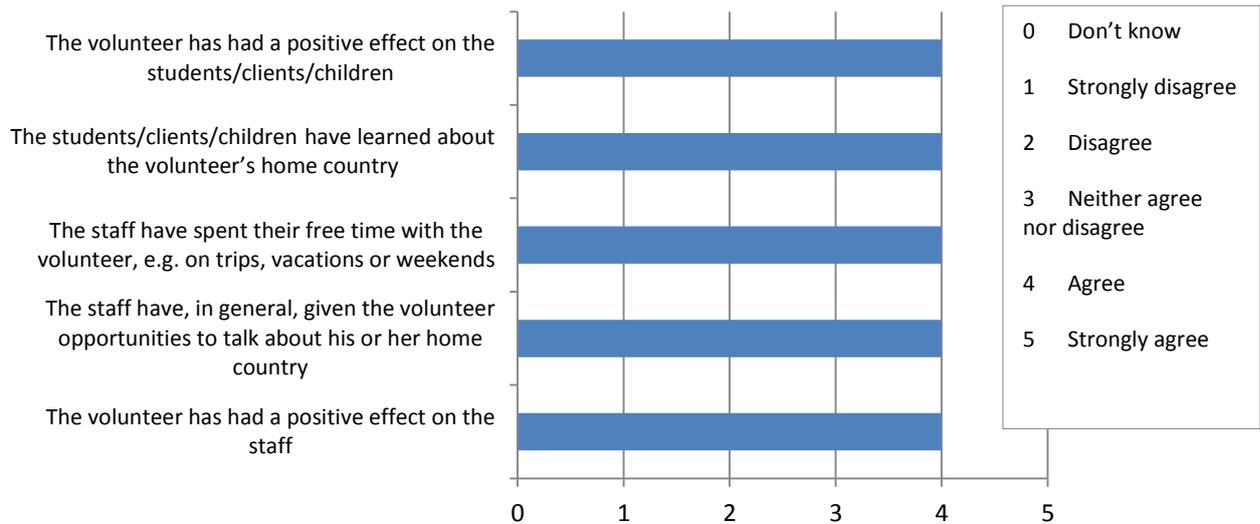
The relationship between the volunteer, staff and beneficiaries was good in all projects; it was never a distant relationship, which means that the volunteers were able to integrate into the organisation and the local community in all cases.

All the organisations noticed that the beneficiaries' interest in the international volunteers' culture (country, history, customs, traditions and practices) had increased during his/her stay. The volunteers shared his/her culture and traditions by means of giving basic lessons in simple greetings in their native language, baking Christmas cookies or telling the children and members of staff about their lives and traditions back home. As mentioned by one of the host organisations:

"... [beneficiaries] and workers also want to know the way of life of volunteers from their home countries and this brings mutual excitement and cooperation hence enjoyable stay"

Nation Builders International Orphanage Home and School

An important thing to highlight in relation to the impact on the international volunteers is that all host organisations believed the volunteers contributed positively to the work of their respective organisations.



Teaching, playing with the children, fundraising, construction, carpentry, cooking, gardening, sports activities. Those are only some of the areas where the volunteers impacted the host projects. The organisations also added that volunteers provided IT services for free, used special skills or knowledge, for instance in the field of therapy or social work, to enhance the work of the host organisation and generally helped making the work of the main staff easier.

“The international volunteer has contributed positively to the work of my organisation both in and outside the classroom. They teach by helping beginners to learn how to write and draw. They also assist the school bus drivers to transport the children to school”

Christ Love Educational Complex

Impact Assessment from International Volunteers

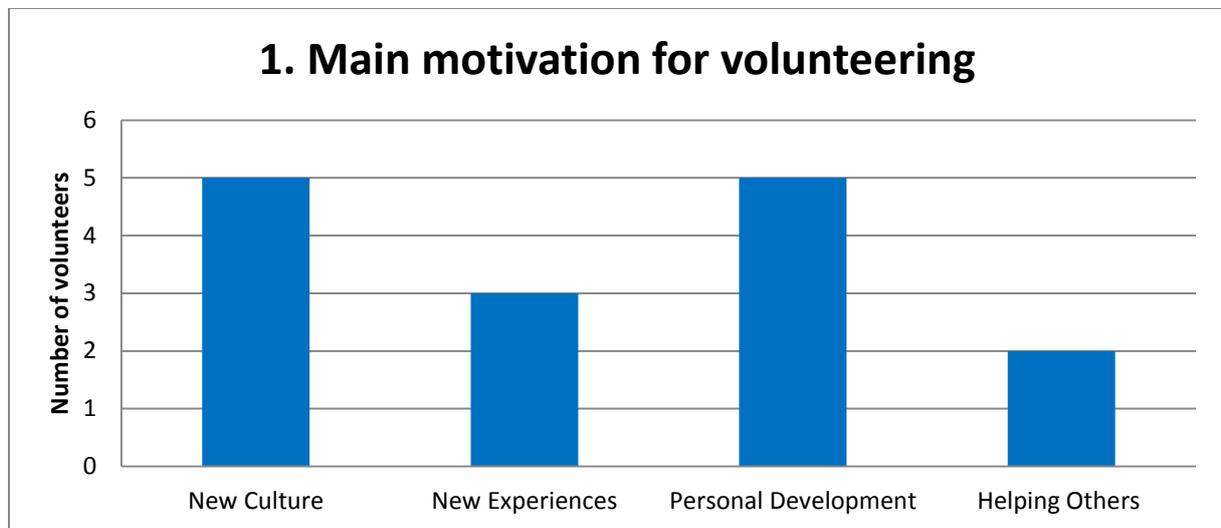
The following data presents an overview of the results gathered from answers provided by five international volunteers in questionnaires handed out at the end of their project stay by ICYE Ghana. The five volunteers were participating in projects of different durations; three of them stayed for six months and two for twelve months.

The questionnaire included 16 questions within the three subjects: A. personal impact, B. social impact, and C. cultural impact. The questions included in part ‘A’ thus focused on areas such as motivation for volunteering, strengths and weaknesses, challenges faced, etc. Part ‘B’ focused on the extent to which the volunteers had been able to network during their stay, experience with host project and as international volunteers, and part ‘C’ on the impact of cultural backgrounds and the volunteering experience.

The three volunteers working on 6-months projects were all female volunteers from Finland, between the ages of 19-22, who had started on their respective projects in August 2014. Also the 12-months volunteers shared certain characteristics. They were both young men between the ages 20-21, from Germany, who had started on their projects in February 2014.

Part A: Personal Impact

1. Main motivation for volunteering abroad



As indicated by the diagram, all of the five volunteers mentioned “learning new culture” and “personal development” as their main motivation for volunteering abroad. Volunteering in order to help or make a difference was a motivating factor for two of them.

2. Strengths and Weaknesses

The next question concerned the volunteers’ strengths and weaknesses. Though expressed differently, most of the strengths mentioned fell under the same categories:

- Strengths: Work ethics, ability to adjust and adapt to changes, social skills and positive attitude.

The weaknesses differed from volunteer to volunteer, including indecisiveness, problems with planning, perfectionism, too emotional, lack of motivation and self-analytical skills.

3. Problems experienced during stay in Ghana

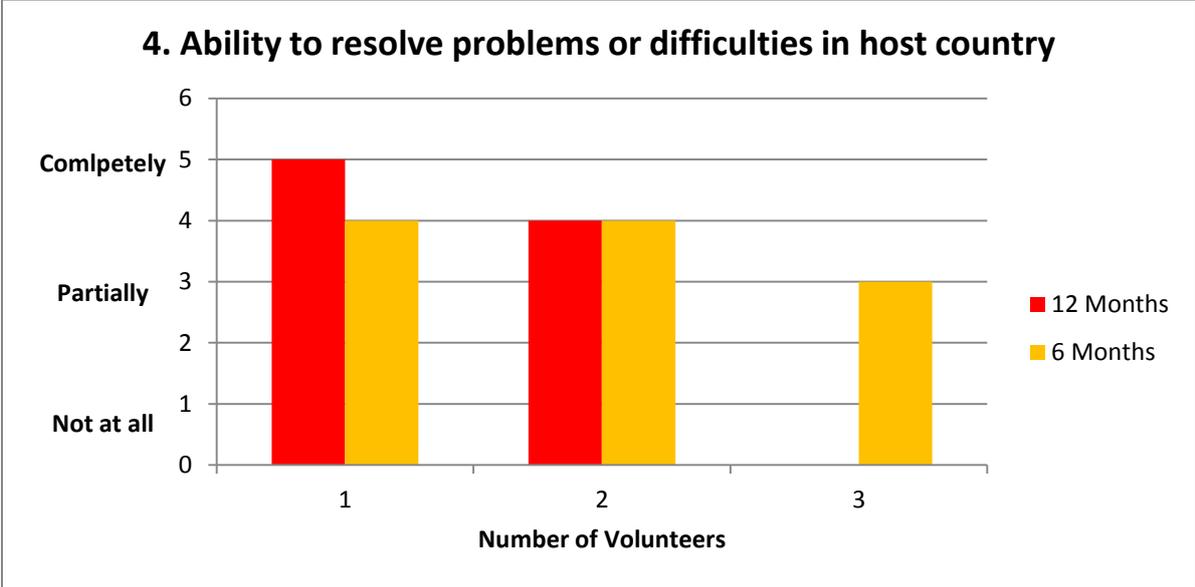
The third question concerned problems experienced by the volunteers during their time abroad. This could for instance be loneliness, homesickness, problems at the host project, language barriers, etc. Four of the volunteers mentioned language barriers as causing problems in the beginning of their stay, and two of them also mentioned having problems with uncertainty about their tasks at their host projects. For one of the volunteers, the language barrier and cultural differences resulted in the volunteer not feeling accepted or welcome by the general community. The fifth volunteer mentioned having experienced a lack of support from ICYE Ghana at the beginning of the stay after having moved and changed to another host project:

“In the beginning I had problems with the receiving ICYE. I felt I didn’t get enough support when I had to change the project. I felt alone and scared. Later on I felt homesick, I didn’t get along with some of my co-workers, I struggled with the language. I also had some health problems.”

International volunteer in Ghana

The first months in the volunteering service period are crucial as volunteers are likely to face challenges in adapting to the culture, feeling lonely and homesick during this time. It is therefore very important that support is forthcoming during this time.

4. Ability to resolve problems or difficulties in Ghana



As indicated by the table above, the majority of the volunteers felt that they were capable of solving problems or difficulties they faced during their time in Ghana. The 12-month volunteers indicate feeling more positive than the 6-month volunteers.

5. Biggest achievement during the stay

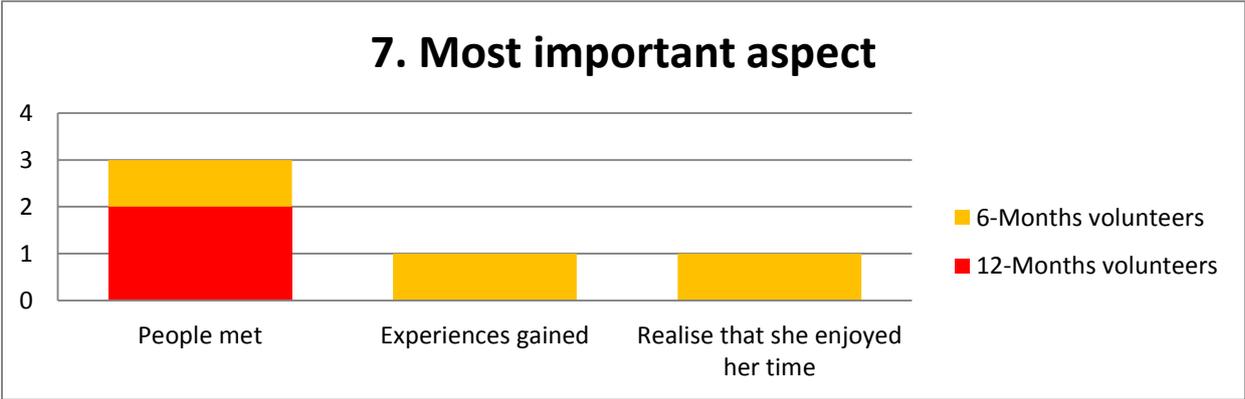
The five volunteers all mention different accomplishments during their stay. However, one of the 6-months volunteers mentions in her answer, that the questionnaire was handed out shortly after their arrival in Ghana and the number of experiences and achievements were therefore limited. Three of the volunteers mention accomplishments related to teaching in their host projects as the biggest achievements, for instance teaching a class on their own or teaching the children their mother tongue, or personal hygiene. Another volunteer mentions having learned to survive difficult situations alone as the biggest achievement, and the last believes that creating a bridge between two cultures has been the biggest achievement.

6. Changes experienced in emotional or psychological well-being or new knowledge about oneself

Two of the volunteers mentioned that they gained new knowledge about their ability to adapt to new cultures, however one as having adapted faster than expected and the other as slower. The volunteer who adapted more slowly also noted how the reactions in the host country were different from reactions in the home country. As described in the questionnaire: *"... I reacted emotionally differently to situations here compared to home. I was expecting to adjust faster to a new culture. I have learnt not to stress so much and I feel happier than before"*.

Another volunteer mentioned how becoming familiar with the surroundings increased his well-being in Ghana. The other two volunteers answered 'no' to the question.

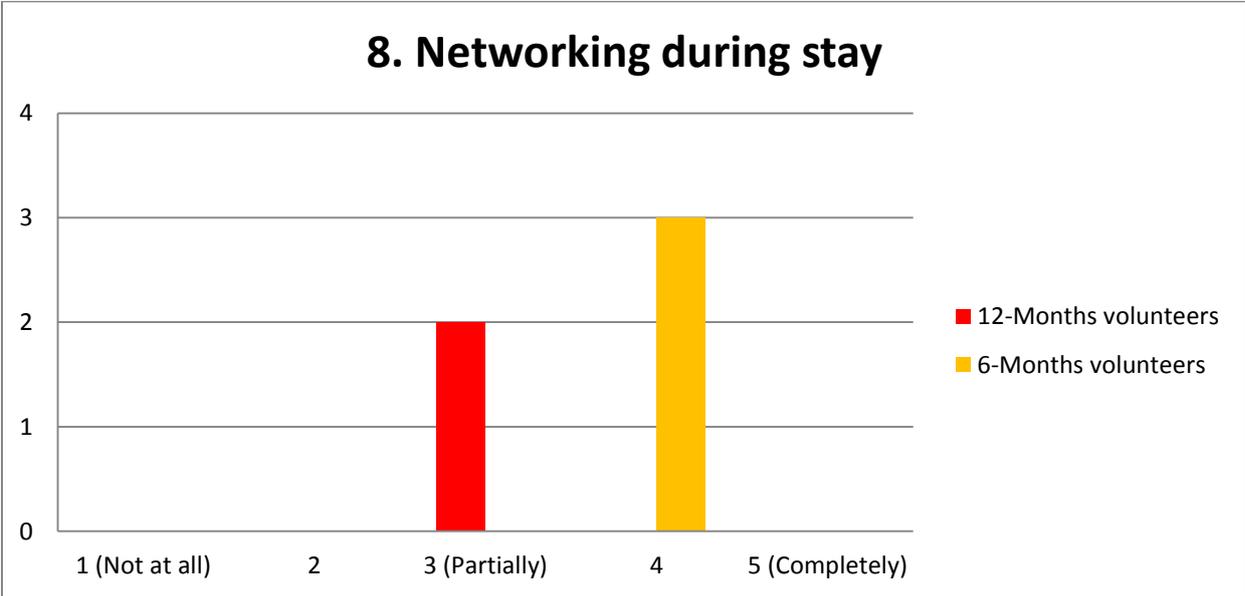
7. Most important experience or aspect learned during the stay



For the majority of the volunteers (three out of five), the most important thing about their stay has been the people they met during their stay and the friends they made, and the things they learned from them and their “*Joie de vivre*”. Another volunteer believed that the experiences, gained through the job and time in Ghana about cultural differences, have been the most important. For the last volunteer, realising that being in Ghana was actually an enjoyable experience was the most important experience.

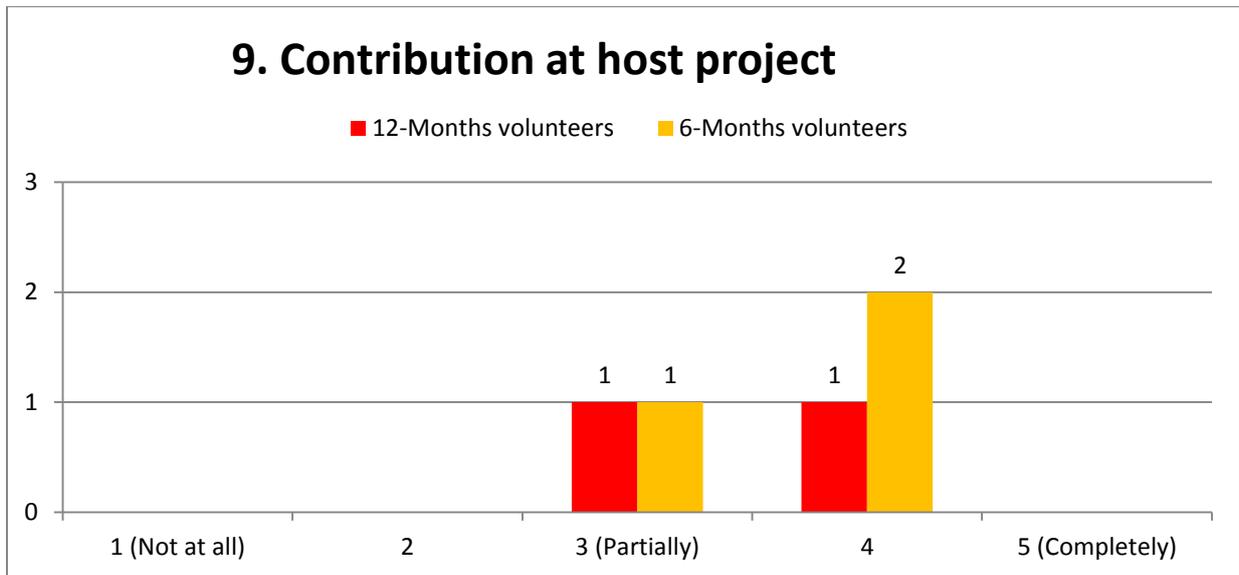
Part B: Social Impact

8. Ability to expand network and make new friends during the stay



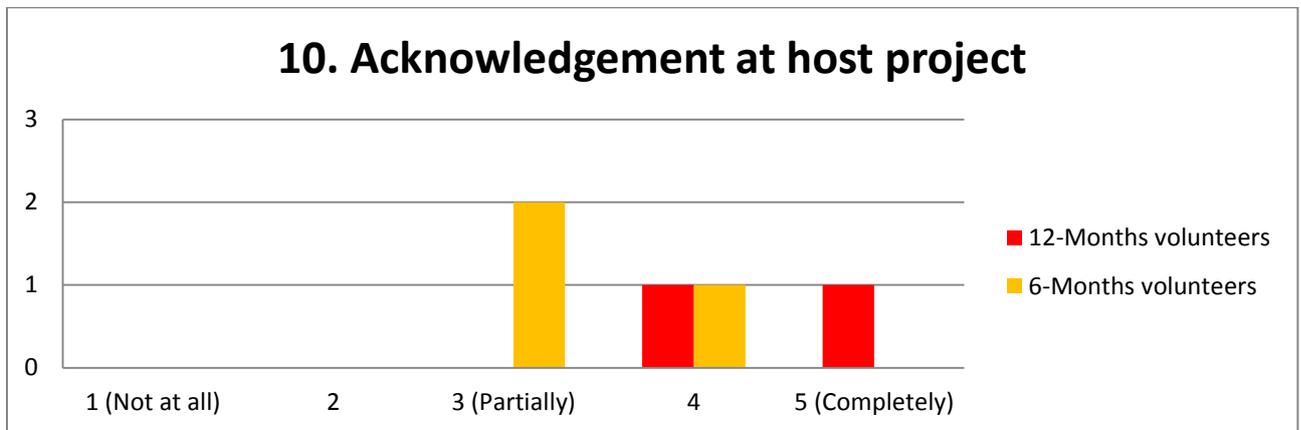
As indicated by the table, the 6-months volunteers generally considered their ability to network during their stay better than the two volunteers, who stayed for a full year. This could be due to the location of the host projects (e.g. 6-months-projects generally located closer to / in more populated areas than the 12-months projects). It would be important to check in the impact assessment conducted in the coming years as to whether similar and divergent responses between 6-month and 12-month volunteers are gained, and if yes, to ask further questions to assess the reasons for this difference.

9. Does the volunteer feel that s/he contributed to the work at the host project?



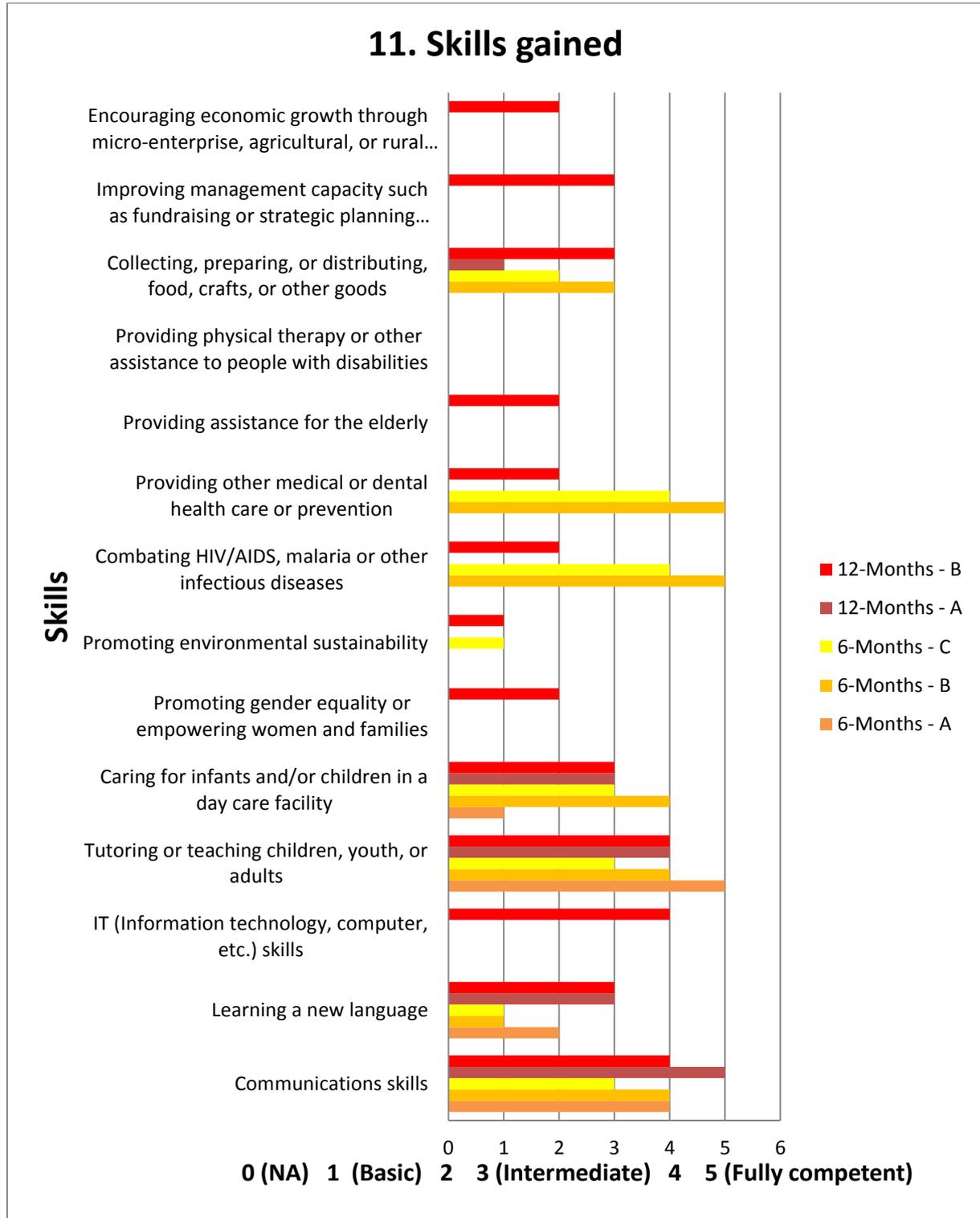
Most of the volunteers felt that they contributed to the work at the host project regardless of the duration of their stay.

10. If so, was the contribution acknowledged by members of staff at the host project?



As indicated by the table, the 12-month volunteers generally felt that their contributions at the host projects were recognised and appreciated more than the 6-month volunteers. The duration of the project plays a significant role – the longer the volunteers’ projects, the larger the opportunities of integration, for learning tasks and improving performance. Similarly, projects have more time to spend with the specific volunteers and thus get to know the volunteer and his/her specific accomplishments better.

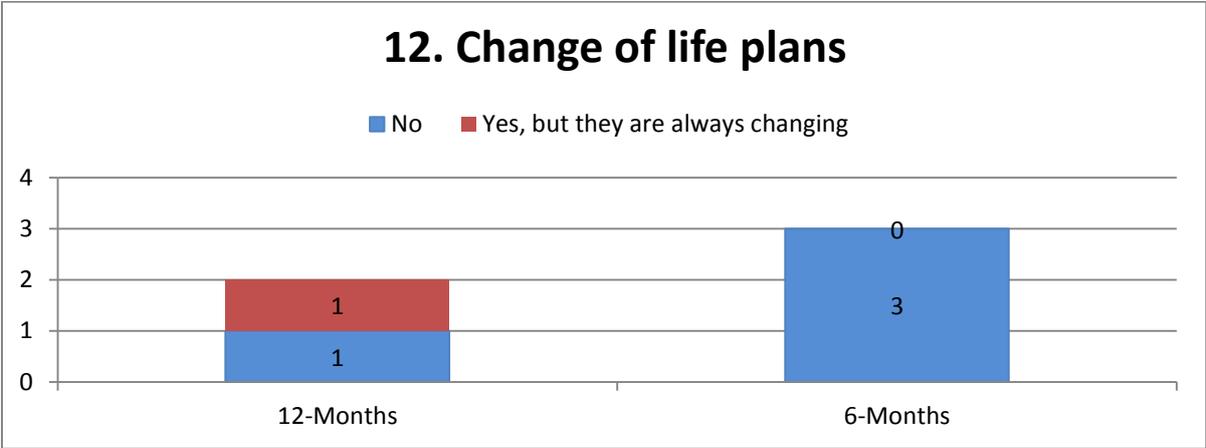
11. Skills gained through volunteering



The table indicates that the 12-month volunteers gained skills in more fields than the 6-month volunteers. We could infer that the tasks and responsibilities increased as they developed through their one-year volunteering period (data shows a broad range of tasks and skills from improving management capacity to IT skills). The long-term volunteers also felt that they had learned a new language to a larger extent than the six-month volunteers. At the same time, interestingly, data from the 6-months volunteers depicts that they feel very or fully competent in the skills they gained. It is possible that the range of tasks being limited, mostly to health-care and caring / teaching children,

lead to competency over the six months. Future impact assessments should include questions about satisfaction with range of tasks and skills gained and their levels of competence.

12. Change in life-plans during exchange



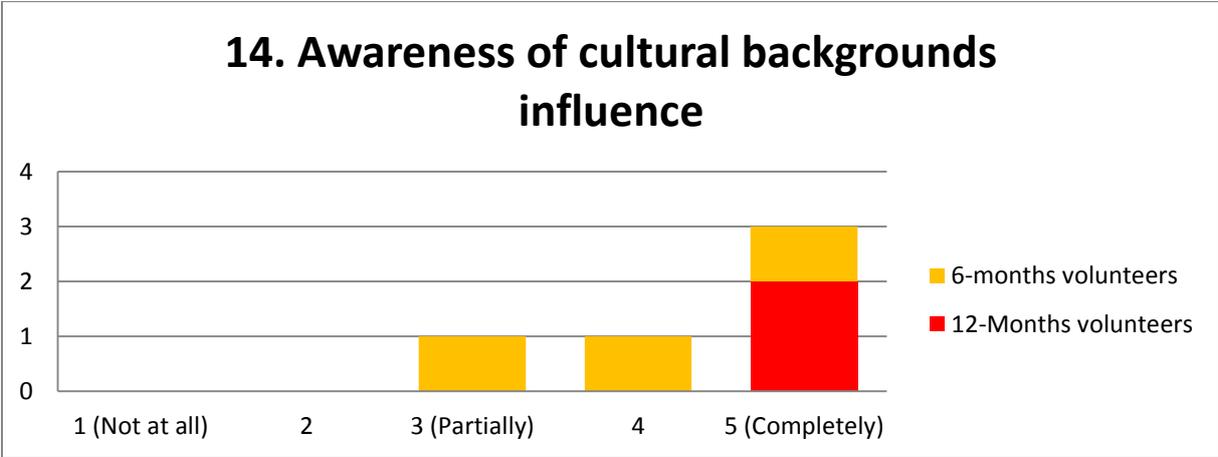
Four of the volunteers mentioned that the volunteering experience in Ghana has not caused their life plans to change. Only one of the 12-month volunteers believed that the experience had made him rethink his plans – but adds that his plans are always changing, and were changing before he went abroad as well.

13. Likelihood of continue volunteering or get involved after return to home country

All of the volunteers would like to continue volunteering or get involved in e.g. the work of NGOs, political, community or environmental organisations after they return to their respective home countries.

Part C: Cultural Impact

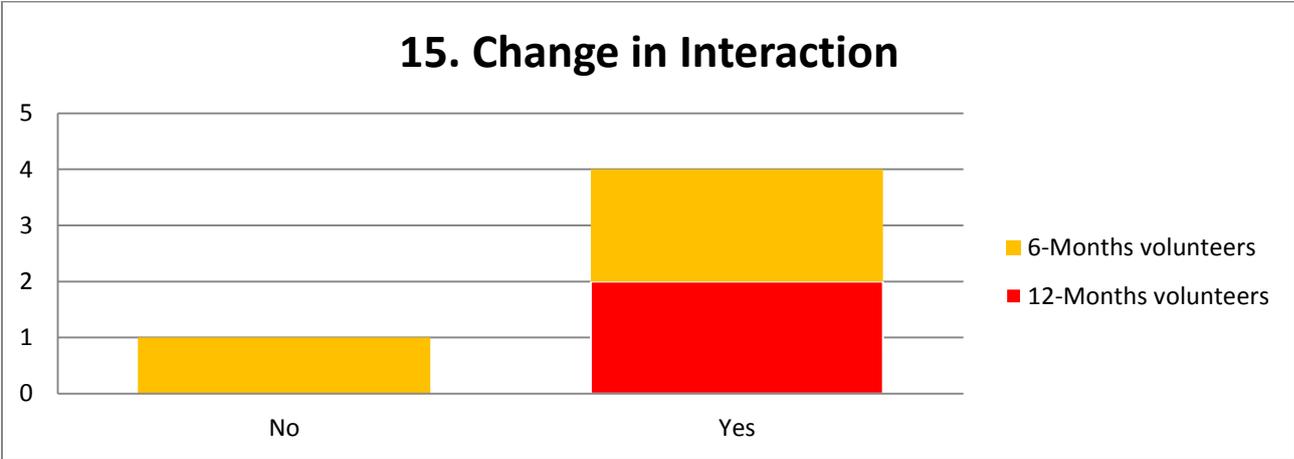
14. Awareness of the effect of cultural background on behaviour after volunteering



The 12-months volunteers were more aware of the impact that cultural background has on behaviour than the 6-month volunteers. However, as one of the 6-month volunteers mentions, they

have only been in Ghana working at their host projects for a short amount of time when receiving the questionnaires.

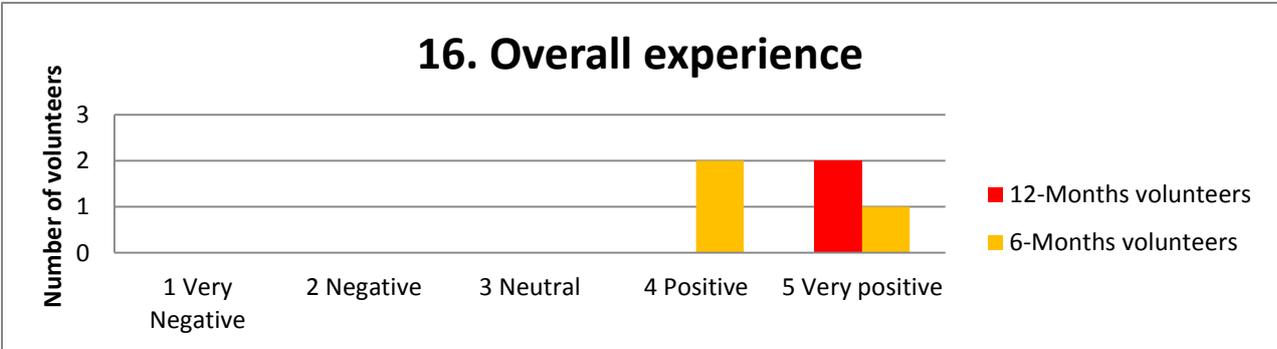
15. Change in interaction with people from different background



Only one of the volunteers believed that the volunteering experience has not caused any changes in interaction with people from a different cultural background. The four other volunteers gave different reasons for this:

1. 6-month volunteer A: *I really understand that people come from so different backgrounds and this must affect their opinions.*
2. 6-month volunteer B: *I had to be more careful when talking about some things, for example religion. In my home country I wouldn't usually greet people that I don't know but here the situation is different.*
3. 12-month volunteer A: *I know now that the cultural background has a huge impact which always has to be noticed.*
4. 12-month volunteer B: *I've realized that I should never watch other people just from my own perspective but I have to try to understand their own culture. That prevents me from judging other people as better or worse but just accept the differences as a normal thing.*

16. Overall experience in Ghana



All the volunteers rated the overall experience of volunteering in Ghana as being positive. The table indicates that the 12-month volunteers had a slightly more positive experience, which can be attributed to the amount of time they spent in Ghana at the time the questionnaire was

administered and/or the duration of their stay resulting in a different / deeper interaction with the co-workers, friends, host family, etc.

Conclusion

The three host organisations in this impact study were in general positive about the volunteers, their contribution and impact on their host organisations. One of them mentioned how the volunteer's engagement was not restricted to the classroom, and all of them ranked positively the impact of the volunteers on both beneficiaries and members of staff. No one mentioned negative aspects of hosting international volunteers.

Comparing the responses of the host organisations to those of the volunteers, both are equally positive about the volunteers' contribution at the host organisations, the volunteers being more self-critical. Two of the volunteers felt that they had contributed only partly to the work and another two felt that their contribution was only partly acknowledged by the host project. Importantly, both host organisations and volunteers were in agreement about noteworthy improvements in the volunteers' language and communication skills through their stay in Ghana.

All five volunteers were also very positive about their volunteering experience, four of them ranking the overall experience as *very positive* and one as *positive*. They mentioned having encountered language-related problems at the start, but felt that they were able to both solve problems and establish new contacts and friendships during their time abroad. This appears to be stronger for the 6-month volunteers than those volunteering for one year (see table 12). Four of them felt that they were almost completely capable of solving their problems and difficulties experienced in the host country, whereas only one felt partly able to resolve the problems encountered (table 4).

If we compare the main motivation of the volunteers for volunteering abroad to the main achievements at the end of their stay, then a correlation can be found in the case of two volunteers, who indicate 'gaining new experiences' and 'personal development' as their main motivation to participate in the programme and also their main achievements. The other three volunteers mention the people they met, thus social contacts and friendships, as being the biggest achievement during their stay. Concurrently, the majority felt that their interaction with people from different backgrounds and their awareness of the impact of cultural differences increased significantly. It could be argued that gaining new experiences is linked to one's social network, which is likely to impact on oneself, one's attitudes and behaviour. Not only are these factors interrelated, it is also possible to state that the ICYE programme had identifiable social, cultural and personal impacts – including professional skills and competencies such as communication skills, a new language, teaching abilities, etc. on the volunteers in Ghana.

In conclusion, it is necessary to state that the group of respondents in this study was very small (i.e. five volunteers, three for six months and two for one year, and three host organisations) to enable a clear examination and analysis of the positives and negatives, likewise the strengths and weaknesses of the volunteering programme in Ghana. Nevertheless, it does illustrate the learning and benefits for both the volunteers and host organisations in the study. It also depicts a few areas where improvements are necessary, e.g. support for volunteers, and it gives pointers for developing the impact assessment questionnaires for future studies in order to fill gaps in this study and enable a more in-depth analysis of certain areas specified in this report.



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