

EYV 2011 - VOLUNTEERING MATTERS

Impact of Youth Volunteering in Mexico

April - October 2011

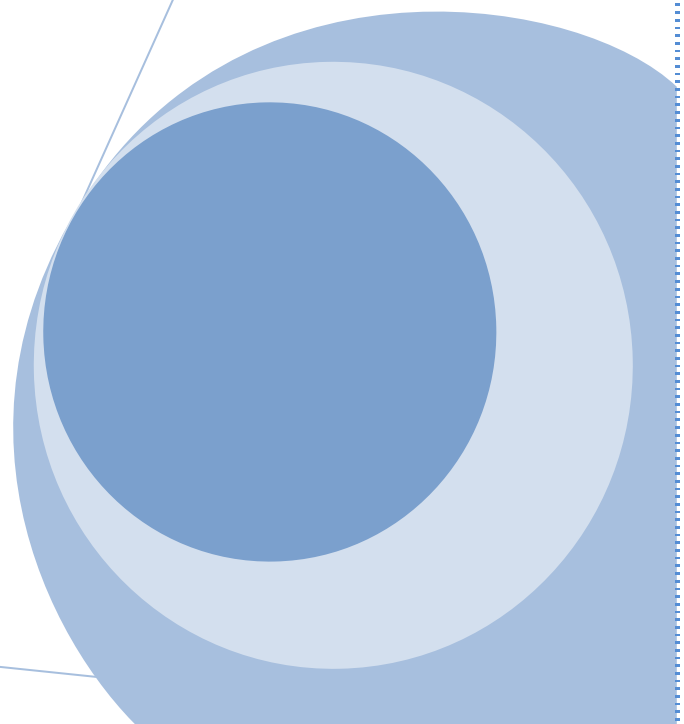
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1 Overview of Volunteering in Mexico

The civil society and third sector in Mexico

Some researches look back into customs and tradition of the indigenous population in Mexico (Reygadas, 2001; de Levy, 2007). The age-old traditions included assisting each other for the well being of the whole village. In this sense, volunteering was the natural activity for the members of the community and it is still present in some indigenous communities of lower income. The colonial and post-colonial period (1521 - 1860) was characterized by a strong presence of the Catholic Church in the creation of charitable organizations. The following period (1861-1960) was marked by the power and strong presence of the State, which was consolidated after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Policies focusing on the needs of the poor were implemented through large government agencies responsible for education, health, welfare, and housing (Layton, 2009). The second half of the 20th century saw the dynamic development of the third sector in Mexico and its relations with the state.

Recent years saw the dynamic development of the third sector in Mexico. This trend is continuous and its characterized also by the professionalization and specialization of NGOs. The NGOs in the 1990s began to build capacities, both financial (foreign funds and financial independence from the State) and technical, which they never had before. Despite positive changes the third sector in Mexico is still relatively small and underdeveloped if compared to other countries. This, however, means there is potential for development and growth in the years to come.

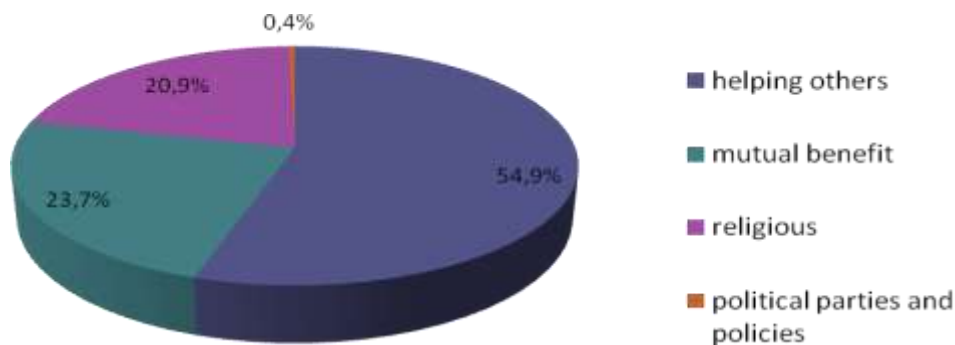
The democratic transition in 2000 led to significant changes within the third sector. Many NGOs, which were actively engaged in pro-democratic movement, lost relevance. New NGOs with the different areas of focus were created and these already existed were strengthened. Relations with the government improved and became more transparent. The INDESOL (*Instituto de Desarrollo Social/ National Institute for Social Development*) was created; today running many programs which goal is to enhance the third sector development. In general, year 2000 marks the civil society's growing visibility.

Publication *Una fotografía de la Sociedad Civil en México* (2011) mention four types of the organizations which can be included in the so-called third sector.

association type	definition	quantity	percentage (%)
helping others	philanthropic sector including foundations, operative associations and institutions providing services to the sector	19,428	54.9
mutual benefit	exclusive benefits for members, including social and sports clubs, business chambers, professional associations, labor unions and others	8,391	23.7
religious	directly related to a church or place of worship that mainly determines their actions and organization mechanisms	7,390	20.9
political parties and policies	seek political power through the democratic competition system	148	0.4
TOTAL		35,357	100

Source: Third Sector Statistics Compendium (Cemefi, 2009), Directory of the National Bureau of Religious Associations (Segob, 2010), Political Association Directories, IFE and State Electoral Institutes, 2010

Types of associations in Mexico, defined by the area of activity, 2010 (%).



Source: Third Sector Statistics Compendium (Cemefi, 2009), Directory of the National Bureau of Religious Associations (Segob, 2010), Political Association Directories, IFE and State Electoral Institutes, 2010

The number of NGOs is relatively small if compared to other countries.

Among 19,428 NGOs mentioned above CEMEFI recognize:

- 10,275 NGOs working within health and social care sector
- 2,855 NGOs working for the social development;
- 1,904 engaged in education programs;
- 1,713 involved in environment protection;
- 904 NGOs working in the human rights field;
- 587 involved in art, culture and recreation

In general, 45% of Mexican organizations are engaged in social support and/or aid services. About 18% support community development and 8% focus on health. The other NGOs focus on issues such as education, research, the environment and human rights.

Volunteering overview

There are many definitions of voluntary work depending on the region and the context of the situation. The term “volunteer” or “volunteering” might not be widely understood in Mexico for various reasons. Firstly, the concept of volunteering is still not well established. Secondly, voluntary work is an expectation of the Mexican culture so that volunteering is not easily identified as a distinct form of activity. Most of the times it is affiliated with religious, church related activities. As mentioned in the previous section, the third sector in Mexico is relatively small compared to other nations. As a consequence, volunteerism is not as well developed, and there is proportionally far less data on volunteer numbers and types of volunteering available. The democratic transition occurring in 2000 in Mexico led to some positive changes in this field.

Mexico has a long tradition of informal volunteerism — it just doesn't call it that. The age-old traditions that included assisting each other for the well being of the whole village are still present in Mexico. Voluntary acts of 'solidarity', as they are called, are simply considered part of the Mexican way of life, they usually occur informally within communities and not in connection with any particular non-profit

organization (though much of it may be church related). Describing Mexico's engagement in volunteering the social service cannot be omitted.

Social service

Social Service (*Servicio Social*) in Mexico is an educational policy that requires youth civic engagement. It is mandatory, federally supported activity for all graduate students.

Social Service was established in 1937 for medical students. They were deployed to rural areas to help meet chronic needs for medical professionals and resources. The initial success of the program resulted in the government doubling its expenditures on public health and expanding the program. In 1947 it became mandatory program for all students. It requires that university students that have completed 70% of their course work engage in 480 hours of community service within six months in order to graduate.

The main objective of the of the Social Service program is to bring students into contact with various sectors of society, in particular those which are the most marginalized. Social service gives students an opportunity to put their knowledge into practice and have their first experience in the labor market. It is intended to raise students' awareness about the problems in their communities and to develop potential solutions.

Community service could be perceived as voluntary work or considered an academic and educational activity. Unfortunately it is often seen as an administrative requirement for students to earn a university degree.

International volunteering

Data on international volunteering in Mexico is very difficult to obtain. There are no official statistics or publications available. There is no official body (nongovernmental or governmental) collecting this kind of information. The only information available is provided by organizations hosting international volunteers but even this is difficult to obtain. From among the Mexican or international organizations hosting international volunteers (apart from SIIJUVE) in Mexico the most recognizable are:

Voluntarios Internacionales México A.C. (VIMEX A.C.)

Voluntarios Internacionales Mexico A.C. is a Mexican organization founded in 1985 and located in Mexico City. It hosts international volunteers in its projects and at the same time it sends young Mexicans abroad. VIMEX organizes Spanish courses, short-term workcamps, EVS, MTV and LTV'S Projects.

Nataté International volunteering A.C

Nataté is a registered nongovernmental organization based in San Cristobal de Las Casas, in Chiapas. The organization was founded in 2006 by a group of Mexican and international volunteers brought together by a common interest toward Chiapas, its complexity and the need to foster local development and peace.

Nataté cooperates with local, national and international partners in order to address the needs of the local communities and groups it works with. Nataté is also member of the Coordination Committee for International Voluntary Service - UNESCO.

Nataté programs are concentrated around: sustainable development, minority empowerment, education, information and awareness rising.

SIIJUVE A.C. (Servicio Internacional para el Intercambio Juvenil)

SIIJUVE is a non-profit organization established in Mexico in 1987. The organization's main goal is to promote youth mobility, intercultural exchange and international voluntary service. The National Committee is made up of co-workers (many former exchangees), host families and program participants. There are five regional groups in Tuxtla Gutierrez Chiapas, Ocotlán Jalisco Mexico City, Puebla and Toluca, coordinated by the national office, located in Puebla.

SIIJUVE works with local community organizations in Mexico to place international volunteers and send Mexicans abroad for intercultural exchange and voluntary service projects. SIIJUVE is a part of ICYE Federation (International Cultural Youth Exchange). Every year it sends around 15 Mexican volunteers abroad participating both in short and long-term programs.¹

¹ More information about SIIJUVE: www.sijjuve.org

2 Action Research

Introduction

This part of the report presents the international volunteering opportunities in Mexico together with impact survey assessing the benefits, pitfalls, and challenges of international volunteering. The research is based on international volunteering programs of SIIJUVE A.C. (*Servicio Internacional para el Intercambio Juvenil*), organization which host international volunteers every year since 1987. Siijuve is also the organization hosting the author of the report.

Questionnaire analysis

Presented below are the results of the research undertaken among the international volunteers participating in SIIJUVE programs in Mexico and organizations hosting them. The research is based on questionnaire consisting of a series of questions. This specific instrument was chosen to collect most relevant data and information regarding the impact of volunteerism.

2.1 ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERS INPUTS

The implemented method and the structure of questionnaire for volunteers include both suggestions received from the ICYE International Office and the method proposed in Volunteering Impact Assessment Toolkit prepared by Institute of Volunteering Research (UK). The latter provides a comprehensive selection of methods and tools, which measure and assess the effects of volunteering. Questionnaires used in this particular research measure the impact of volunteering under the following areas: motivation, institutional support, general impact, personal impact and recommendations. At the same time, personal impact has also been gauged on the basis of physical, human, economic, social and cultural capital.

- Physical Capital - the tangible benefits accruing to volunteers (training courses attended, hours given to the community, etc);
- Human Capital - personal development (confidence, self-esteem vocational skills) and employability;
- Economic Capital - individual costs of volunteering (expenses, opportunity costs) and individual value;
- Social Capital - increased trust, higher rates of participation in public affairs;
- Cultural Capital - attachment to cultural identity and the appreciation and understanding of other cultures.

2.1.1 *General Information about Volunteers*

17 international volunteers took part in the research.

- **15 volunteers** participated in 1-year program – **52 weeks**.
- **2 volunteers** came to Mexico for **26 weeks** (6 months).

- **12 Female**
- **5 Male**

Area of work: disadvantaged children (13)
food bank (2) (1 volunteer half time)
people with mental disabilities (1)

disadvantaged women (1) (half time)

people with addictions (1)

In Mexico most of the international volunteers work with disadvantaged children: In orphanages, with disabled children or street children. These projects require a lot of patience, commitment and responsibility from sometimes very young people. In many cases children comes from marginalized families, they do not speak proper Spanish nor have the contact with the outside world (and international community).

2.1.2 Motivation

What was the main reason for your participation in an international volunteering program?

wanted to know the culture (9)

wanted to help (8)

wanted to learn language (7)

wanted to experience living in another country (3)

wanted to have new experience (2)

wanted to have a gap year (1)

wanted to travel (1)

wanted to have fun (1)

wanted to learn (1)

2.1.3 Institutional Support

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

How satisfied are you with the support you received from the sending organization?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	1	3	6	7

How satisfied are you with the support you received from the hosting organization?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	3	9	5

How satisfied are you with the host family, which was chosen for you/project placement?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	1	4	5	6

Positive and neutral responses dominated in the sending and host organization evaluation. Most of the volunteers were satisfied with the support they received from sending and hosting organizations and stated that the time between applying and being accepted was in most cases longer than 3 months.

Some comments made by the volunteers are presented below:

- I was lucky with my family and my project.
- I am satisfied with my current family but I had problems at the beginnings and had to ask repeatedly to move.
- In Germany I didn't receive information about Mexico specifically... and I would have liked it.
- I had problems with the migration office.

Thus, as observed, not all the aspects of volunteerism are 100% positive. There are always some difficulties to overcome but they also enrich the whole process of volunteerism and are important learning experience for international volunteers.

2.1.4 General Impact

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: **0**=not relevant, **1**=very dissatisfied, **2**=dissatisfied, **3**=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, **4**=satisfied, **5**=very satisfied

I had a specific skill needed by the host organization.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	3	6	4	1	2

I transferred useful skills to the host organization.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	5	10	1	1

I made a lasting contribution to the organization or community members.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	1	1	6	6	-

My services could be more effective provided by a full-time staff member.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	5	5	2	2	2

If I had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	8	5	-	-	1

My presence in the community may have caused some problems.

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	8	4	1	1	-

Some comments made by the volunteers are presented below:

- I think for the children in my project it was very good to have somebody with a completely different background, culture... they were interested and of course I was too.
- Maybe a full time staff member would have provided my services more effectively but in my work they don't have money to hire anybody else.

How satisfied are you with the training you received?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	1	-	6	6	2

How satisfied are you with the relations with your co-workers?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	2	9	5

How satisfied are you with the results of your work?

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	2	2	9	4

2.1.5 Personal Impact

Physical capital

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

Access to training, courses

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	-	5	7	4

Access to social events with other volunteers and/or staff

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	1	2	8	6

Access to support for your volunteering

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	1	2	11	3

Most of the volunteers (11 out of 17) were satisfied or very satisfied with their access to training and courses. 14 volunteers were satisfied or very satisfied with their access to social events and the same numbers of volunteers were either satisfied or very satisfied with access to support for their volunteering. It proves that most of the volunteers benefited from the support.

Economic capital

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

Sending organization staff supported me well before and throughout my volunteer placement (in your country)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	1	1	7	7

I received training on the host culture (Siijuve)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	1	2	3	11

Local staff supported me well throughout my volunteer placement (Siijuve)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	1	3	9	4

I received thorough training on my volunteer duties (project)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	2	5	3	3	2

I was trained through everyday tasks (project)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	1	5	-	6	4

My ability to get paid work has increased

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	-	-	4	9	1

Most of the volunteers (14) were satisfied or very satisfied with the training and support they received from sending organization. Equally, volunteers agree or strongly agree (14) that they received training on the host culture and support from local staff when they arrived in Mexico. Responses regarding support received within the project vary a lot. The reason could be that volunteers were based in different projects and each organization has own policy (or lack of it) regarding training and support to volunteers. 10 out of 17 volunteers agree or strongly agree that their ability to get paid work has increased.

Human capital

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: **0**=not relevant, **1**=very dissatisfied, **2**=dissatisfied, **3**=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, **4**=satisfied, **5**=very satisfied

My personal development (e.g. confidence, self-esteem, self-management)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	4	5	8

My skills-base (e.g. from teamwork through to computer literacy)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	3	13	1

My general health and well-being

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	7	6	2	1

Volunteering influenced personal development of 13 out of 17 volunteers. 14 out of 17 volunteers admit that their skills-base increased. According to 6 respondents, volunteering did not influence their general health and well-being. 7 volunteers claim that their general health and well being worsened on completing their voluntary service project.

Social capital

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

Access to new contacts and networks

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	1	6	10

Sense of trust in others

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	4	7	6

Participation in local activities

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	4	9	4

For almost all volunteers social capital increased! 16 volunteers claim that their access to new contacts and networks increased or increased greatly. 13 out of 17 have a greater sense of trust in others. 13 respondents answered positively when asked about participation in local activities.

Cultural capital

QUESTION: Please answer the following questions. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=very dissatisfied, 2=dissatisfied, 3=neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 4=satisfied, 5=very satisfied

It affected my ethnic, faith or religious identity

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	4	8	4

It greatly increased my appreciation of other peoples' cultures

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	-	7	10

It increased my participation in cultural, environmental or leisure activities

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	4	8	5

It exposed me to communities different from the one(s) that I grew up in

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	-	3	14

I was exposed to new ideas and ways of seeing the world

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	2	2	13

I gained a better understanding of the community where I worked

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	2	5	10

Many of the volunteers were interested in coming to Mexico to experience living in a different culture. Therefore their answers are not surprising. Most respondents increased their cultural capital in the various ways as observed above.

2.1.6 Recommendations

Would you recommend international volunteering to other people?

All 17 volunteers answered positively to this question! Some of their comments include:

- I spend amazing year, learn language and so on... there is so many reasons!
- Time to figure out where you are going with your life.
- ...because while helping others you yourself gain a lot as well and adopt a new culture.
- Yes, because during the exchange you learn a lot and at the same time you give it back to your host country.
- Cultural learning, experiences, friends...
- I have changed for better in so many ways and while helping other people have been able to experience something amazing.
- A lot of experience, you can help others
- You can do something good and at the same time you learn a lot about yourself and others
- You get to make a difference in other people's lives while travelling and experiencing a new language and culture.
- You earn so many experiences and it's very good way for intercultural communication.
- It's a very nice and interesting experience, you learn and see a lot, it change your point of seeing things, have the possibility to do something very good, to help and to do something different."
- It's an experience that's very important for orientation in life enriches the volunteer, you learn a lot

To summarize – all of the volunteers were very positive about their experience in Mexico. Whether the benefit was the language, new friends, new experience, freedom or experiencing different culture - there was not one person who regretted participating in international voluntary project.

2.2 ANALYSIS OF HOST PROJECTS´ INPUTS

2.2.1 General Information about Organizations

11 organizations took part in the survey.

Location of organisation:

4 in the state of Ocotlan, 4 in Puebla, 1 in Chiapas, 1 in Toluca and 1 in Mexico City.

Project Work Area:

6 organizations work with disadvantaged children, 3 are engaged in educational activities and 2 work with disadvantaged women

Previous Experience in hosting volunteers:

Majority of the organizations started hosting volunteers in the recent years (2006, 2007, 2008). There are, however, organizations having a long tradition in hosting international volunteers (1980, 1997).

Motivation to host volunteers:

Responses below show how important the cooperation with international volunteers is for the organizations:

- *to improve the way we work*
- *to share experience*
- *to receive help and to know people from other countries*
- *it is a cultural exchange and help*
- *it is important experience for children to meet people from other countries*
- *to help us raise awareness of the needs of others*
- *to show us different point of view*
- *we learn from international volunteers*
- *international volunteers are more engaged in their work*
- *we need their help*
- *international volunteers contribute their time, skills, knowledge, culture*

The answers presented above confirm the necessity and importance of voluntary exchange programs. They also show how valuable international volunteers are for the local Mexican organizations especially taking into consideration that there is no culture of volunteering in Mexico. International volunteers could be an excellent example for the local people to get involve in voluntary work.

2.2.2 Recruitment

Do you have any requirements for accepting an international volunteer?

If so, please mark all that apply. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

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

...have specific skills (for example, they must be qualified to provide medical care)

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	5	4	1

... have a certain level of education

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	2	6	2

... be of a certain age

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	1	1	6	2

...be able to speak one or more local languages

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	2	7	1

...submit an application to volunteer with us

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	-	5	5

...complete an interview to volunteer with us

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	-	8	2

...be qualified in some other way

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	-	-	2	6	1

We do not have any requirements for our international volunteers

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	4	3	-	2	-

Most of the researched organizations have some kind of requirements for accepting international volunteers. According to the organizations those skills are not crucial but very important. Six out of eleven organizations confirmed that a certain level of education is necessary. The same number of organizations agrees that the volunteer must be over a certain age. Seven respondents agree and one strongly agrees that international volunteers must speak one or more local languages. Ten out of eleven organizations conduct interviews with the potential volunteers. The main conclusion from the interviews conducted by the author of the report is that the volunteer has to be mature enough to work in the project. Sometimes volunteers work with children with disabilities, abandoned or street children. Maturity, patience and willingness to learn are most important attributes of the volunteer.

2.2.3 Training/Support Training

How are international volunteers managed at your organization?

- a. We provide one staff person to organize the international volunteers **(4)**
- b. We provide several staff people to organize the international volunteers **(3)**
- c. We have one or more volunteers who manage international volunteers **(3)**
- d. International volunteers manage themselves **(1)**

Depending on the size and capacity of the organization and also on the number of international volunteers, different organizations manage volunteers in a different way. Four of them provide one person managing volunteers. Three have more than one person and the same number of organizations has a volunteer who manages international volunteers.

2.2.4 Volunteer Impact

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

If so, please mark all that apply. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

Volunteers

...contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	1	-	2	4	2

...provide more people to get our work done

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	4	2	1	2	2

...provide a new viewpoint or perspective

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	-	6	5

...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	-	3	8

...provide an opportunity for local people to learn more about their own nations and culture

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	1	1	4	4

...help us attract local volunteers

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	1	-	1	5	2

...bring international attention to our work

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	-	-	2	4	4

...bring credibility to our work

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	1	2	8

...are effective

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	-	-	4	6

...help our economy by spending money locally

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	4	-	-	2	3	2

...generate revenue for our organization

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	4	1	2	2	2	-

...become financial donors

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	-	2	2	3	1

...become advocates upon return home

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	-	1	2	3	2

... services could have been more effectively provided by a full-time staff member

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	5	1	-	1	3

If the person had not volunteered, a local staff member would have provided these services

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	3	1	-	5	1

...help our organization develop the relationship with the local community

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	-	-	-	6	2

...help to intensify networking efforts at national / international level

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	1	-	-	4	5

The answers vary a lot depending on the question. All respondents agree or strongly agree that international provide a new viewpoint or perspective as well as an opportunity for local people to learn more about other nations and cultures. Most of the organizations admit that volunteers contribute needed skills not found in local staff or volunteers and are more effective. They also help attract local volunteers, bring international attention and credibility to the work of the organization. Respondents admit that international volunteers help the organization to develop the relationship with the local community and help to intensify networking efforts at national and international level.

Most of the researched organizations do not expect any kind of financial support from the volunteer. It is interesting however that four organizations answered that the volunteer should become a financial donor of the organization. Six respondents also admit that a local staff member would have provided services better than the volunteer.

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

If so, please mark all that apply. Use the scale: 0=not relevant, 1=strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3=neither disagree nor agree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree.

International volunteers:

...require a lot of training

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	2	2	5	-	1	1

...require a lot of supervision

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	3	3	-	3	1

...distract staff and local volunteers from the work

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	3	3	3	-	2	-

...are accustomed to different ways of doing things

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	-	-	3	5	3

...are not always welcome in our community

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	3	5	-	1	1

...may not have the skills needed

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	2	2	6	-

...may not have the language abilities needed

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	1	1	1	8	-

...don't stay long enough

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	1	4	-	5	-

...can be difficult to find

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	2	5	-	3	-

...take the place of local volunteers

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	6	3	-	1	-

...take the place of local jobs

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	4	5	-	1	-

...are not effective

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	5	4	1	1	-

...are expensive

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	1	5	4	-	1	-

...create problems inside the community

	0	1	2	3	4	5
No of responses	-	5	4	-	2	-

Asked about the challenges of hosting international volunteers respondents answered in different ways but most of the answers have a positive context: Most of the organizations do not agree that international volunteers require a lot of training and supervision or that they distract local staff and volunteers from the work. The respondents however agree that international volunteers are accustomed to different ways of doing things and may not have the needed language skills. This, however, usually changes after a couple of months because all the volunteers learn Spanish and at the end of their projects are able to communicate fluently. According to respondents, international volunteers do not take the place of local staff, they are not expensive nor do they create problems inside the community. Organizations do not perceive international volunteers as expensive.

All respondents would recommend other organizations to host international volunteers. Below are presented some of their comments:

- because of the support and help we receive
- because international volunteers share their ideas with us
- because international volunteers are sociable and responsible
- they help us to understand the world better
- the relationship with them is always rewarding
- because international volunteers have a good influence on the people we are working with
- because we have only good experience with international volunteers
- because our children have contact with different cultures

Results presented both from the questionnaire for volunteers and for organizations prove that both sides gain thanks to hosting international volunteers. It is a school of life for young people but also a great experience and help for the local community.

3 Conclusions

“Coming here was the best idea in my life”, “Mexico: The best decision I ever made!” “The most unforgettable time of my life...” - these are the words of the volunteers ending their stay in Mexico. What else can justify better that volunteering is an amazing experience, enriching the life, changing the perception of the world and making it a better place. Maybe the fact that through volunteering help is reaching those who did not receive it before? Maybe the information that voluntary work has an economic value that can be counted in thousands of dollars? Or maybe the fact that all people working with the international volunteers recommend other organization to host volunteers because “they help us to understand the world better” and “the relationship with them is always rewarding”. And these are only a few quotations!

Looking at the history of more formal and organized volunteering in Mexico one could say that it is underdeveloped. True. When asked, people do not know what the word “volunteering” means but in fact voluntary work lies deep in the history of the country. Many people volunteer not knowing that they fulfill the criteria of volunteering 100%. And yes, organized or international volunteering in Mexico has still a long way ahead. But in my opinion there is great base to build on and great potential to be developed.

Responses to the questionnaires proved that volunteering was a great experience both for the volunteers and for hosting organizations. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn from each other, to learn the language, to learn the culture, exchange experience and points of view. For the hosting organization, it means daily help and support. For the beneficiaries of the organization, it is a unique occasion to meet and work with someone from a different part of the world. This cannot be underestimated as many of the children (in Mexico volunteers work mostly with them) come from unprivileged background and as the staff from the hosting organization underlined, spending time with international volunteers gives them a sense of being noticed, taken care of, equality.

Of course, there are some minor issues that could be improved: Better matching of the volunteer and the project or better organization of the work of the volunteer. But those factors are easy to eliminate through the process of training and evaluation.

For me, the author of this research, the most important finding was the confirmation that volunteering is a pure win-win activity. All stakeholders gain. The beneficiaries, hosting organization, local community and what is important volunteer him/herself. The help and care is provided to those in needs, it is intercultural learning for the community and a real life changing experience for the volunteer. Thanks to organizations like SIIJVE the lives of many people changes every year and it can only be described as an enriching experience. Volunteering matters! No doubt!