

## **VOLUNTEERISM AND CO-PRODUCTION**

### **Session Title**

## **Theoretical Frameworks for Volunteering in Development**

### **Abstract**

The papers in this panel illustrate that, although volunteering is represented as a universal practice, it is not universally valued, theorized or understood. In particular, conceptual approaches to international volunteering beyond the dominant North to South model have been largely neglected in research and theory. The papers presented in this panel each reflect the challenge of validating Southern voices as an overlooked area of scholarship on volunteering for development.

The paper by Nichole Georgeou responds to challenges that arise from the North to South model of international volunteering as an individualized and market-based provision of services to “needy communities”. She questions whether contemporary theorizing on volunteering for development is sufficient given the enormity of volunteering happening in the South as people engage their own communities to advance development goals. Indeed, the state of theory and scholarship on volunteering for development is reflected in the field’s inadequate definitions, language, and concepts to describe how “informal” or “community-based” forms of volunteering that occur organically in civil society are constructed.

The paper by Jacob Mati moves beyond the common association of volunteering for development in the Global South as an informal expression of people-to-people engagement and community-based action. He explores the notion of horizontality illustrated by the emergence of a new volunteering culture and practice in the global South focused on regional pan-African volunteer development cooperation. By focusing on emerging forms of international volunteering in the African context, Mati helps to illustrate the complexity of volunteering in non-western contexts with an eye on new theoretical approaches to explain these innovations.

Bailie Smith and Hazeldine’s paper extends the notion of volunteering for development at different levels and in different contexts. The authors further explore how volunteering cultures come together to shape global policy-making and organizational innovation. Using data collected through conversations with volunteering-involving organizations—most from the Global South, the authors apply theories of cosmopolitanism to inform the opportunities and challenges of using volunteers to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

The final paper in this panel by Lough and Tiessen examines the conceptual value and practical limitations of deconstructive analytical approaches in scholarship on volunteering for development. They discuss how critical scholarship such as post-colonialism offers insights into the systemic challenges that perpetuate inequality of opportunity, “othering”, paternalism, and stereotyping in international volunteering—arguing that these scholarly lenses are less effective at facilitating a valid analysis of the agency of individuals who participate in volunteering. The authors use findings from research conducted across several countries in the Global South to offer an alternative analysis that reinforces the value of normative theoretical lenses such as the capability approach to help explain the responses and perspectives of volunteer hosting-communities and organizations.

### **Participants**

Benjamin J. Lough, [bjlough@illinois.edu](mailto:bjlough@illinois.edu); University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (**Session Organizer**)

## Theorising International Volunteering for Development: Civil Society or Market Society?

### **Title** (*Panel Paper*)

Theorising International Volunteering for Development: Civil Society or Market Society?

### **Author**

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### **Abstract**

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Statement of concerns: The distinct activities of volunteering for development and voluntourism are often conflated in public discourse and scholarly work. This paper concerns the construction of a theoretical framework that demarcates the activity of volunteering for development, an activity that occurs within civil society (Georgeou 2012), from voluntourism, the combination of adventure tourism with volunteering, which occurs with the market and which is driven by the consumer's desire for an authentic experience of poverty in developing countries so as to 'make a difference' to people's lives (McGloin and Georgeou 2015).

Changes in modes of volunteering for development form part of what Cahill (2014) sees as wider changes to management practices through a desire for greater efficiency within neoliberalism. The conceptualization of volunteering as service provision reflects the new managerialism of government (Georgeou 2014), and this extends into the operations of development volunteer organisations. At the same time, the push for market-led solutions to global inequality has seen the emergence of the voluntourism sector. Voluntourism taps into the logic of the 'moral neo-liberal' individual (Muehelback 2012) who is 'empowered' through the market to deliver development to the 'needy other'. Contrary to some scholarly literature, which treats this phenomenon as a social movement (Conran 2011; Mostafanezhad 2014), I contend that voluntourism exchanges occur through the market, and cannot be classified as social movements as voluntourists do not form a collective subject but rather pursue individual acts of 'compassionate morality' (Bolton 2014).

The key tension then surrounds theorizing the activities taking place when examining volunteering for development, and whether these should be located within the realm of civil society or of the market.

Arguments of paper: (1) Voluntourism is undertaken within the market as part of a pattern of the commodification of poverty, yet despite increasing numbers this does not represent a social movement as much as the consumption of a package, the benefits of which flow to private enterprise; (2) The largest group of people who volunteer for development in developing countries remain principally unstudied, and require greater theoretical attention as in many cases they do not see the activities they perform as even constituting 'volunteering'. In contrast to the Western desire to link atomized individuals into a movement, many who do development work within indigenous communities regard their roles as supporting the sustainability of their own community.

#### Conclusions and relevance:

Academic study needs to shift to Volunteers in the South who work among the people of the south, and language must be found to describe the scope of actions they perform with respect to their own development in sustaining their livelihoods. This is particularly important with respect to understanding how volunteering for development can contribute to understanding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also sheds light on how the Western desire to 'do good' has become commoditized.

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### Individual Submission

Panel Paper

Horizontality: The Peculiarity of African Volunteering?

**Title** (*Panel Paper*)

Horizontality: The Peculiarity of African Volunteering?

## Author

Jacob Mwathi Mati, jacobmati@gmail.com; University of the South Pacific (**Presenter**)

## Abstract

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Volunteerism is a universal, yet culturally diverse human phenomenon. As such, while there are universal traits of volunteerism, contextual peculiarities in its expressions breed in different social, economic and political settings. Consequently, the academic debate on what constitutes volunteering in different sociocultural contexts is far from concluded. Besides disciplinary binaries (Hustinx, Cnaan & Handy, 2010), the challenge here is accentuated, in part, by the inability of existing theories, due to their western sociocultural and political orientations, to adequately capture the complexity of volunteering in non-western contexts. Obviously, studies based on such theories do not reflect the reality of the extent and varieties of volunteerism in non-western settings. For instance, a major overlooked feature of African volunteering (affecting the full utilisation of African agency in development) is its horizontality.

This paper reviews existing studies of expressions of African volunteering to demonstrate that the African socioeconomic and political realities have incubated a horizontal form of volunteering that is largely informal; involves interpersonal contacts between servers and beneficiaries with similar socio-economic characteristics; and is often based on collectivist solidarity and survivalist mutual aid goals (cf. Caprara, Mati, Obadare & Perold, 2012; Mati, forthcoming; Perold & Graham, 2014). However, African volunteerism's horizontality transcends the informal. The embryonic formal South-South volunteer programmes such as the Southern African Trust's SAYxchange and the African Union Youth Volunteer Service Corps, among other, exemplify African volunteerism's ubiquitous horizontality (Mati, forthcoming). Unlike the classic North-South vertical volunteering where servers are likely to be from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, the South-South model has evolved a new category of a formal volunteer in the South whose socio-economic profile is not dramatically different from those that they serve (cf. Caprara, et al., 2012; Everatt, Habib, Maharaj & Nyar 2005; Graham, Patel, Ulriksen, Moodley & Mavungu 2013; Patel, Perold, Mohamed and Carapinha, 2007).

Given the foregoing, the paper suggests that horizontality is useful not only for its heuristic value on understanding the idiosyncrasy of African volunteering, but has implications on theory and practice of volunteerism for development; organically evolved features can be successfully tapped even in formal volunteering arenas.

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## Individual Submission

Panel Paper

Volunteering cultures, global policy making and the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a cosmopolitan approach?

**Title** (*Panel Paper*)

Volunteering cultures, global policy making and the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a cosmopolitan approach?

**Author**

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**Abstract**

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Central to the global promotion of volunteering have been claims for its universalism; that the 'values' that underpin volunteering can be found in all societies in some forms, even if 'named' differently (Leigh et al, 2011). This affords legitimacies within global policy making discourses, creating possibilities to harmonise strategies of poverty reduction across cultures and places. Whilst diversity and important differences are often acknowledged in processes of promotion and celebration, we lack scholarship on the ways in which volunteering cultures are coming together through both global policy making and organizational innovation and practice on the ground. This reflects particular existing preoccupations and silences in current scholarship and practice on volunteering and development.

To date, research on volunteering and development has largely focused on individual international volunteers from Europe, North America and Australia (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2013) with

'culture' in this context largely examined through the lens of encounters with 'locals' (e.g. Griffiths 2015) and what kinds of cosmopolitan and forms of citizenship this produces (e.g. Rovisco 2010; Baillie Smith et al. 2013). Secondly, whilst there has been attention to the histories and traditions through which diverse forms of volunteering are produced, such as Ubuntu in South Africa (Leigh et al. 2011), or around 'service' in South India (Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2012), there has been less attention to how these come together with different volunteering 'cultures'.

This paper critically analyses the tensions between claims for volunteering's universalism and its local and particular articulations in the global South in the context of global volunteering policy-making. The paper argues that, in global volunteering discourses, the cultures of European and North American volunteering are often 'normalised' and rendered as 'neutral' in the context of celebrating connections with 'other' volunteering cultures. Through this process, the often unequal coming together of volunteering cultures is sidelined, and the complex systems of organizing and rewarding volunteering in global South settings become marginalized in a drive for a seemingly neutral focus on measuring and managing volunteering.

To develop this argument, this paper uses theories of cosmopolitanism (e.g. Vertovec and Cohen 2002) as a lens on global volunteering actors rather than individual volunteers. Analysing data from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' Global Review of Volunteering, which involved data collection in 163 countries and qualitative interviews with 600 people, the paper explores how the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement works across universal and particular conceptions of volunteering between its head office and national societies. It draws on theories of cosmopolitanism, and particularly Delanty's idea of the 'cosmopolitan imagination' (Delanty 2006) to explore some of the ways in which volunteering cultures can and could come together, arguing for a more mutually transformative process at the heart of global volunteering policy debate and practice. The paper concludes by exploring the challenges this presents in the context of the roles of volunteers in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, and their embodiment of global policy-making and promotion of local actors.

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## Individual Submission

Panel Paper

Theoretical alternatives to deconstructive analyses on volunteering for development

### Title (*Panel Paper*)

Theoretical alternatives to deconstructive analyses on volunteering for development

### Author

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### Abstract

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Much of the theorizing on international volunteering has been produced through post-colonial or critical-race theory (Heron, Cook, Baaz, forthcoming) and neoliberal critiques of the influence of market and managerialist forces on volunteering for development (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Georgeou, 2012; Lyons et al. 2012; Perold et al. 2013). While these theories have merit for their contributions to reflection and deconstruction, they are limiting when they fail to incorporate the views of the host communities themselves—who may not feel implicated in, or “victims” of, the effects of neocolonialism and neoliberalism. As such, theoretical contributions building on post-development, post-colonialism, and critical race theory often represent only one side of the equation. Despite aiming to represent vulnerable voices, without incorporating the actual perspectives of volunteer-receiving organizations in the South, scholars often inadvertently serve to reproduce colonial theoretical debates. When such scholarly debates are disconnected from practice realities, they may do real harm to international volunteer programs that develop needed and valuable partnerships with hosting-communities and organizations.

This paper considers avenues and opportunities for rethinking theories of international volunteering by taking into consideration the perspectives of the volunteer-receiving organizations in the Global South. It incorporates the results of surveys and interviews with staff members of partner organizations that host international volunteers across a variety of program models—from short-

term and youth-based international volunteer models to long-term and professional models.

Findings from research conducted across multiple low-income countries point to challenges with dominant post-colonial critiques—particularly in contexts where solidarity and capacity development are prominent endeavors of volunteer programs. The paper uses empirical findings to contrast post-colonial and neoliberal critiques with normative capabilities and human development theoretical frameworks (Lough and Mati, 2012; Nussbaum, 2003).

Although both deconstructive and normative theoretical lenses have value for making sense of thematic and conceptual notions that inform volunteering for development—including reciprocity, mutuality, global and intercultural competencies, ethics and social justice—the focus on capabilities and human development theories appear to have more practical utility for explaining the responses of host communities and volunteer-receiving organizations in the global South.

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