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POLICY PAPER

Motivations and Contributions of Development Organizations to Meeting the Global Goals through International Volunteering

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Introduction

Sending international volunteers to Global South countries is one of the forms of Official Development Assistance (ODA) used by most traditional donors.¹ In the case of the Slovak Republic, it is also an instrument of its foreign policy, which also seeks to support development in the programme and partner countries of ODA SR in this way. In almost a decade of the existence of the national volunteer programme from the Ministry of Foreign and European affairs (MFEA SR), two hundred junior and senior volunteers have been sent from Slovakia to selected low-income countries. This study offers an insight into how international volunteering projects (including those under the SlovakAid brand – managed by Ambrela members) can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda.

Mapping and reporting on the impact of volunteering projects provides an opportunity for the parties involved (but primarily for the sending organisations) to reflect on their interactions with both the people sent and other partners, opening an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement of the overall volunteering management. However, the appropriate way to measure and evaluate such contribution in relation to the Global Goals is still being sought. The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) is lending a helping hand with a new online platform launching in autumn 2021, including a self-assessment tool to measure the impact of volunteering for development in several areas. In fact, little research has been conducted to demonstrate the benefits of volunteering for international development.^{2,3} In the Slovak Republic, the first such research,⁴ also focusing on the motivation and contribution of sending organisations to the Global Goals, was carried out in spring 2021.

1. Do not measure the impact, but rather contribution to the 2030 Agenda

In September 2015, the international community at the United Nations approved a set of priorities for achieving sustainable development – the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.⁵ Its key principles are transformation, integration, and universality, with the slogan **‘Leaving no one behind’** – that is not to leave anyone aside, on the margins of the society. The Global Goals (SDGs) are thus expected to be met by all, including the so-called developed countries.⁶

In 2018, the Slovak Republic adopted its own approach to the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda,⁷ which was reflected at the national level through six National Priorities for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It also developed a Concept for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the international environment under the title **‘Responsible Slovakia – sustainable development beyond our borders’**, which is a reflection on Slovakia’s possible engagement in the external environment

1 SAIDC / SlovakAid, 2021

2 Perold et al., 2013

3 Burns, 2015

4 Markovič Baluchová, 2021

5 UN, 2015

6 UN stats, 2016

7 MIRD SR, 2020



Volunteering in Rwanda: an educational project of Caritas Slovakia in Kibeho. Photo: Erik Mihalda, 2021.

towards the implementation of the Global Goals.⁸ It also covers the field of ODA, including its international volunteering programme.

Global organisations sending international volunteers abroad have long struggled with how to measure the contribution of their volunteer programmes to the 2030 Agenda and the Global Goals (SDGs). Initially, small studies were conducted, focusing on partner organisations' views on the impact of volunteering on international development, **accompanied by country-level case studies.**⁹ For example, the Singapore International Foundation (SIF) commissioned research aimed at meeting the specific SDG 17 Global Goal – Partnerships for Global Goals. The Global Goal SDG 4.7 on inclusive, equitable and quality education, which focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, was also examined.¹⁰ The potential of volunteers to remain in the development sector after their return from the placement is emphasized by organisations involved in international volunteering and by volunteers themselves. It is returning male and female volunteers who have the potential to fulfil SDG 4.7 and bring a critical global perspective to local areas of work, study and everyday life for themselves and others, and can contribute as active citizens to solutions to global poverty and social exclusion.¹¹

Already in 2011, The International Labour Organization (ILO) developed a **Manual on Measuring Volunteering**,¹² which consisted of collecting basic quantitative data on the amount and nature of

8 Office of the Government SR, 2017

9 Lough, 2012 & 2016

10 Bridge 47, 2021

11 Comhlámh, 2013 & 2014

12 ILO, 2011

volunteering. Such data should be collected as part of regular data collection at national level, however, only ten countries have so far used the manual.¹³ Models of potential ways to measure the impact of volunteering on development and the Global Goals have recently been presented at conferences of the International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum).¹⁴

The problem so far has been not only the lack of reliable data, but also the lack of available tools to measure it. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that the optics through which volunteering practices are understood in the Global South, as well as the tools for measuring their impact (monitoring and evaluation), are often developed in the Global North countries. There may therefore be a 'Northern bias' in their evaluation.^{15,16}

The 2009 pilot mapping of Forum members and non-members took many years to complete and focused only on UN Volunteers. The Forum's suggestion was, for example, do not to use the term impact, or measuring impact, but rather contribution. It is therefore appropriate to focus on the contribution of volunteering to development, which may be easier to demonstrate.¹⁷ Several priorities for a global agenda for research on volunteering for development were also identified, but implementation will depend on the active involvement and ownership of volunteering research teams, both nationally and internationally.¹⁸ However, UNEP stresses an important lesson from the measurement period of the previous Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): if processes are to be successful, indicators of achievement must be 'SMART' (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic/relevant, and time-bound), consistent over time, with existing standards and agreements, avoiding duplication. They should be comparable to international results and universally applicable.^{19,20}

2. Understand the motivation for volunteering projects in low-income countries

The National Volunteer Programme – the 'Programme for sending volunteers and expert volunteers to developing countries',²¹ was prepared and approved by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic (MFEA SR) on the initiative of the Slovak NGDO Platform in 2012.²² Two hundred people were sent to the field during the decade of the programme. A total of twelve Slovak sending organisations have managed international volunteering projects under the SlovakAid brand (both preparing and sending at least three people to the field). Their representatives took part **in the Spring 2021 research**,²³ one part of which focused on motivations – not of the people being sent, but of the teams within the development organisations. The reasons why nonprofits chose to implement

13 Haddock & Devereaux, 2015

14 Allum, 2019

15 Butcher & Einolf, 2017

16 Millora, 2021

17 Allum & Onuki, 2019

18 Devereux et al., 2017

19 Haddock & Devereaux, 2015

20 UNEP, 2015

21 Markovič Baluchová & Kimuli, 2020

22 Slovak NGDO Platform, 2013

23 Markovič Baluchová, 2021



Volunteering in Angola: supporting new skills development of vulnerable children. Photo: SAVIO archive, 2014.

volunteer cycles under the SlovakAid brand abroad were identified and analysed, what it all entails and how they benefit from it. Selected findings are presented in the following subsections.

2.1. Adhere to the principle of compliance with ODA SR priorities

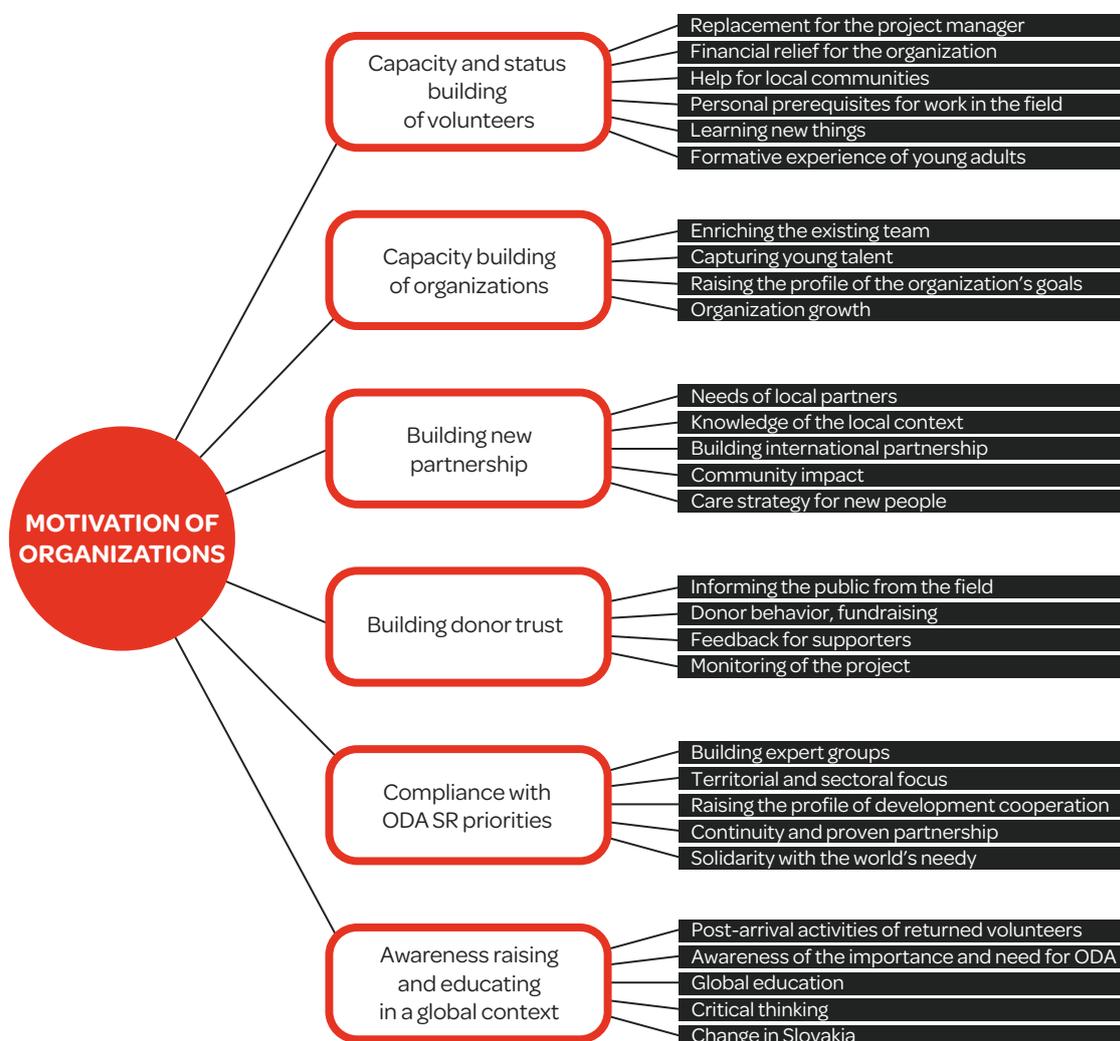
The Slovak Agency for International Development Cooperation (SAIDC) states on its website that it is not yet possible to obtain a university degree in international development studies in Slovakia, and therefore international volunteering is one way of building groups of experts in this field.²⁴ The principle of compliance with the goals of the ODA SR is respected, the volunteering programme thus helps to fulfil the goals and policies of the ODA SR according to the current Medium-term National Strategy for Development Cooperation of the Slovak Republic for 2019–2023.²⁵ It is an ambition to support **27 territorial priorities** in the Western Balkans, the Middle East, the EU Eastern Partnership, Eastern Sub-Saharan Africa and still in Afghanistan,²⁶ and **6 sectoral priorities** (quality education, good health, good governance, and civil society development, food security and agriculture, infrastructure and sustainable use of natural resources, support for the creation of a market environment).

²⁴ SAIDC, 2021

²⁵ MFEA SR, 2019

²⁶ Ambrela, 2020

Representatives of specific sending organisations – members of Ambrella also confirmed their **development intentions** (in line with the priorities of the ODA of the Slovak Republic) in the above-mentioned research as the reason for implementing volunteer projects. They link volunteer projects with partners in the places where they already implement or want to implement a development project. They prepare volunteer projects with organisations with which they have cooperated or with which they are currently jointly preparing a project application for a SlovakAid grant.²⁷



Graphical representation of each category with the identified motivations of Slovak development nonprofits for implementing international volunteering projects. Source: Dr. Božena Markovič Baluchová (May 2021)

²⁷ Markovič Baluchová, 2021



Volunteering in Kenya: working with farmers on sesame seeds distribution. Photo: ADRA Slovakia archive, 2016.

2.2. Contribute to capacity building – both individual and organisational

In terms of **capacity building and the status of the volunteers themselves**, if the sent person has had good preparation and training, he/she can be an asset – both to the local and the sending organisation, and to some extent can replace the project manager in the field. However, the secondment should follow the principle of not taking over the work of local staff.²⁸ Participants in the research also reported that international volunteering serves to enrich the existing project team as well as to **build the organisational and other capacities** of local partners and their field offices. It is also a good way for an organisation to retain talent and nurture potential employees. The volunteer programme should reflect the local needs of the community – the longer an organisation has been operating in a low-income country, the better it knows the local context and the needs of the local community. This brings synergies with its activities, allowing the organisation to specialise in particular areas and especially in certain local socio-cultural, political and social contexts. The presence of volunteers can lead towards establishment of long-lasting and quality partnership, a visible impact (contribution to social change or improvement of the quality of life) in a given community.

Sending development organisations that organize fundraisers in Slovakia to help those in need abroad confirmed in the above-mentioned research that they value the contribution of volunteers in monitoring and reporting on activities, as well as informing the public about the situation on the ground.

²⁸ SAIDC, 2021

The personal experience of the sent people and the so-called Slovak element help **to build the trust of the donors** during fundraising events. Giving speeches during campaigns and fundraisers are mostly part of the post-arrival/return activities in the last phase of the volunteering cycle. The aim is to spread awareness about volunteering and the importance of the ODA SR, to raise awareness about the 2030 Agenda and to 'domesticate' the Global Goals,²⁹ as well as to educate in the global context.

3. Set indicators to map and measure volunteering for development

Documenting the contribution of volunteer programmes and projects to the Global Goals requires an explicit linking these activities and outcomes directly to the seventeen goals of the 2030 Agenda (SDGs). At first glance, this seems straightforward – link a specific **volunteering activity to one of the Global Goals**. For example, the provision of training for schoolteachers is clearly linked to education, Goal 4. However, many programmes and projects respond to several SDGs simultaneously and in synergy with each other.³⁰ Thus, international volunteers can contribute to the achievement and transformation of the Global Goals in all thematic areas in ways that address one or more of the Goals at the same time. Global Goal 17 even explicitly mentions volunteer groups as actors in the implementation of all seventeen goals.³¹ Specifically, however, the sent people can provide technical expertise in areas such as health (Goal 3), education (Goal 4), clean water and hygiene (Goal 6), renewable energy sources (Goal 7), and sustainable ecosystems (Goals 13, 14, 15). They can develop skills and build capacity, thereby increasing employability, especially of young people and those with limited access to the labour market (Goal 8). Volunteers also have proven experience in shaping attitudes and catalysing behavioural change, which applies for example to issues such as gender equality (Goal 5), clean water and hygiene (Goal 6), sustainable consumption (Goal 12), climate action (Goal 13), as well as building trust within relationships that lead to increased social capital and stronger social cohesion (Goal 16).³² It is up to organisations managing international volunteering programmes and projects to adopt the tool of mapping their specific volunteering activities against the Global Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. A 'crosswalk' map would show the organisation's volunteering activities in one column and their link to specific Global Goals in the other column. The next step would then be to report and evaluate the collected mapping of linkages – both nationally and internationally.³³

29 UNV, 2015

30 Haddock & Devereaux, 2015

31 UNV, 2015

32 UNV, 2018

33 Haddock & Devereaux, 2015



Volunteering in Uganda: monitoring of HIV clinic clients in Buikwe. Photo: Marek Čulaga and eRko, 2017.

4. Transforming partnerships for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda

Sending development organisations abroad must consider the impact of innovation on volunteering for development. They are also faced with a bold proposition: to align volunteer programmes more explicitly with social movements and active citizenship, not as a technical process (supporting communities on the ground as before) but rather as a political one.³⁴ Experts from the Forum call for a necessary transformational or transformative change for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda. An essential part of this transformation is transformative partnerships – relationships between parties that lead to social change with a view to transforming the lives and prospects of the volunteers themselves.

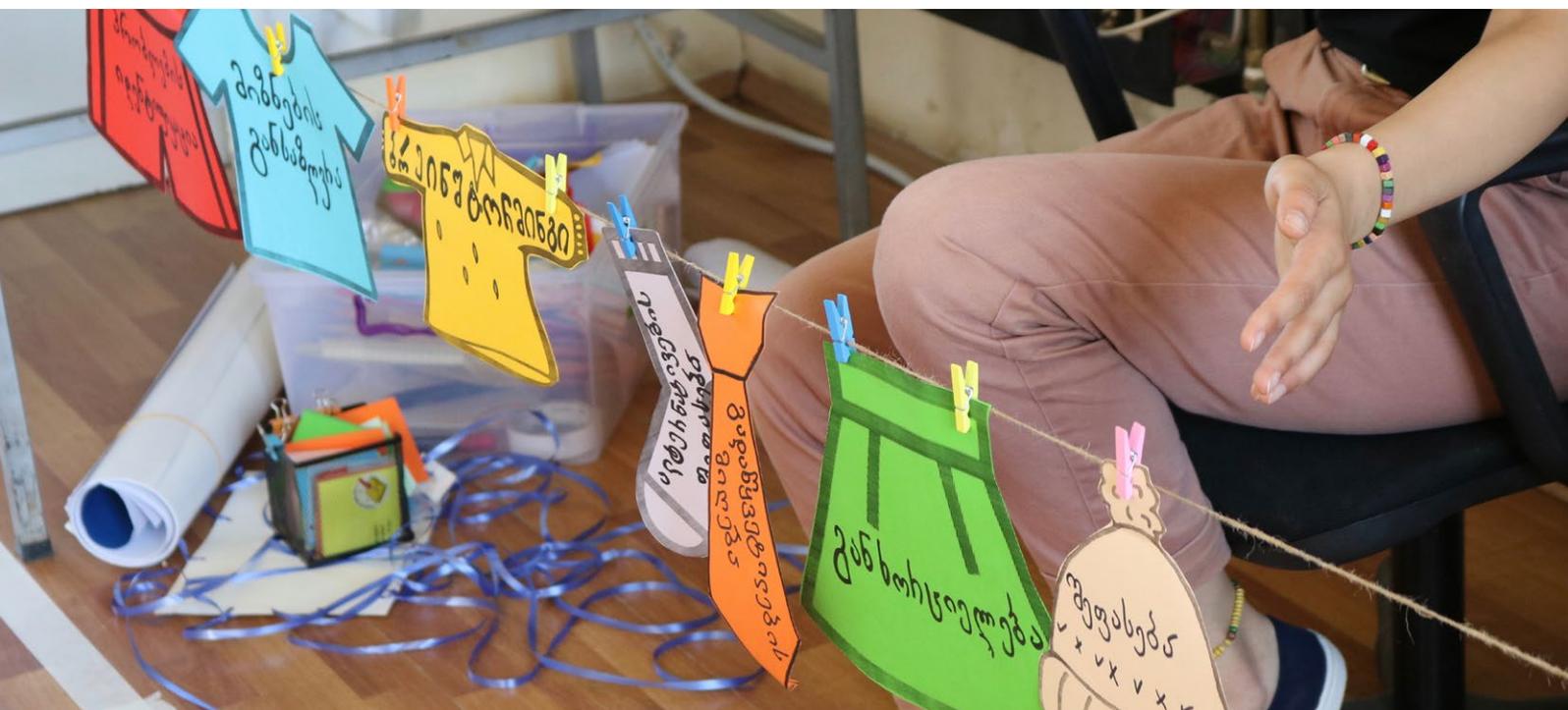
The benefits of such partnerships, **the interactions of all stakeholders** (and the trust between partners), result in sustainable change for individuals and the communities targeted by development interventions.³⁵ Global Goal 16.7 is to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; therefore, all stakeholders should be equally involved - both in the

³⁴ Allum, 2016

³⁵ Haddock & Devereaux, 2015

selection, allocation and mobilization of volunteers and volunteer staff in line with mutually agreed strategic objectives.³⁶ Key factors that enhance reciprocity in **transformative partnerships** include partnerships between volunteers, local host organisations and communities; receiving and sending organisations; and also, the sending organisations' relationships with donors.³⁷

Together with the new volunteering standard – **'The Global Volunteering Standard'**³⁸ – the Forum launched the 'Global Volunteering Standard Platform' in autumn 2021 to put the principles of the standard into practice. The platform is the first online best practice site on volunteering for development. It consists of the Standard itself; as well as a free and interactive **self-assessment tool** (the 'Self-Assessment Tool') that will allow volunteer organisations to measure success in areas such as the design and implementation of volunteer programmes and projects, the management of volunteers, and the impact measurement. Key actions for such measurement include: identifying specific indicators for measuring success together with the community; linking them to the indicators used for monitoring and measuring the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; involving all stakeholders of volunteer projects (including local communities – the beneficiaries of development cooperation in a specific ODA partner country) in participatory data collection in the field, as well as in the process of measuring and reporting results – impact (contribution of volunteering to the Global Goals) in an appropriate language and format.³⁹



Volunteering in Georgia: working with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Tserovani. Photo: ADRA Slovakia archive, 2018.

36 Perold et al., 2013

37 Lough, 2016 & 2019

38 Forum, 2021

39 Forum, 2021

5. (Instead of a conclusion): Do not neglect the contribution of sending organisations

Exploring the contribution of international volunteering projects to the 2030 Agenda and the Global Goals is growing, but it often focuses on the contribution of the volunteers themselves.^{40,41} Research on the role of sending organisations in building the necessary partnerships and effective development interventions on the ground is still in its infancy.⁴² In the Slovak Republic, however, this role of Ambrella members is not overlooked or underestimated; the first such research has been carried out this year. A new document with a volunteering standard and a self-assessment tool for organisations on the new online platform 'Global Volunteering Standard Platform', prepared by the Forum, should also help to measure the impact of volunteering.

International volunteers currently play a significant role in society – among other things – in slowing down radicalisation in relation to the phenomenon of migration.^{43,44} And it is sending organisations that can facilitate critical debate and worldview formation of volunteers in the final phase of volunteering cycles – in the context of post-arrival/return awareness-raising activities and education for global citizenship. At the same time, they influence educational and development activities through their relational approach. Thus, the completed volunteer placement (and the whole project and programme) contributes not only to the mind-shift of the individuals, but also to improving the resilience of the whole communities involved.⁴⁵



Providing educational activities continues through the Covid-19 pandemic – also thanks to volunteer projects implemented by Ambrella members. Photo: Erik Mihalda, 2021.

40 Matulayová, 2012

41 Matulayová et al., 2012

42 Lough, 2016

43 Allum et al., 2017

44 Markovič Baluchová, 2020

45 Lough, 2016

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