

ICS MID-TERM EVALUATION

A SUMMARY



The ICS Programme

International Citizen Service (ICS) is a youth volunteering for development programme that brings together volunteers aged 18-25 from the UK with volunteers from developing countries.

Our programmes operate in some of the poorest communities in Africa, Asia and South America. ICS is funded by the UK government and led by VSO in partnership with a consortium of youth development and volunteering organisations. Volunteers take part in placements which aim to achieve:

1. a positive contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable development in the host country;
2. the personal and social development of volunteers;
3. the building of volunteers' skills to become agents of social change within their own communities and beyond.

The second phase of ICS began in June 2015. A midterm evaluation was carried out in order to better understand the community development outcomes of the ICS programme. The evaluation was conducted by VSO and included fieldwork in 16 projects across 5 countries: Zambia (4), Kenya (4), Nigeria (4), Bangladesh (1) and Tanzania (3). The final report was published in November 2017 and this document summarises some of the key highlights.

Some of the projects which were visited and explored as part of the fieldwork for the mid-term evaluation of ICS are shown below

Nigeria

VSO volunteers worked on Back2School projects to ensure children access education. This increased awareness about the importance of education for all, particularly among parents, teachers and local leaders.

Tanzania

Raleigh International volunteers worked with young entrepreneurs, providing training and in some cases loans. This increased the skills and capabilities of young entrepreneurs to develop profitable businesses.

Zambia

Teams of VSO and Raleigh International volunteers in Zambia helped to increase the reach of local health services by raising awareness and interest among the local community, on key topics including SRH.

Bangladesh

Teams of VSO ICS volunteers worked on a health project in a community where speaking out on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) was considered taboo. They trained peer educators and representatives of youth clubs on SRH who could talk to local community members about these sensitive subjects. As a result, there has been increased awareness about health issues in the local community and particularly within harder to reach areas.

Kenya

Balloon Ventures volunteers worked with young entrepreneurs, providing them with business training and in some cases, small loans. This resulted in a number of new businesses being established by young local community members.

VSO volunteers supported the development of organised spaces (Inclusive Neighbourhood Spaces) where young deaf people could come together in the local community and discuss issues. As a result, this group gained significant information about government funds available. They were then successful in applying for the funding which is being used to help local deaf children.

The Evaluation Process

The evaluation was carried out in three phases starting in June 2016 and finishing in October 2017 as outlined in the diagram.

PHASE 1

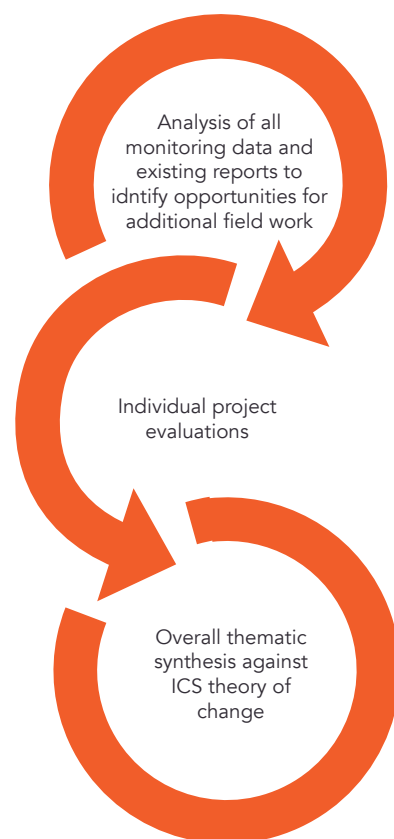
A full analysis of data captured through end of placement reports was carried out on over 130 projects. This helped identify individual projects for the field work.

PHASE 2

Information from the fieldwork, including data from community members, partner organisations and other stakeholders, was analysed. Learning from each project was shared at a final in-country in-country workshop so learning could feed immediately back into programme design.

PHASE 3

A synthesis of all the findings from phases 1 and 2 were collated into a final report.



ICS Theory of Change



The Evaluation Questions

The evaluation questions were designed to test the current ICS Theory of Change:

- 1 What changes do the ICS interventions contribute to and how does this come about across different contexts and sectors?
- 2 To what extent do the ICS interventions lead to change across the eight identified dimensions of change?
- 3 Which aspects, if any, of the ICS delivery model build relationships and how do these impact the lives of poor and marginalised communities?
- 4 How sustainable are development outcomes and impacts? What aspects of relationships and what components of change contribute to greater sustainability?

The findings

The evaluation included projects across education, sexual and reproductive health, livelihoods and entrepreneurship. The questions on how and why change has happened, were thoroughly explored. As a result, certain patterns of change emerged, and they help explain and predict how ICS can contribute to positive change. The evaluation found that ICS has contributed to the following patterns of change in communities.

- **Pattern 1:** ICS increases access to information, services and resources; builds community structures, and builds social capital and active citizenship by: **unlocking resources in the community, establishing relationships and fostering collaboration.**
- **Pattern 2:** ICS strengthens community structures and promotes patterns of sustained active citizenship, **through joining outside and inside knowledge (ICS volunteers and communities working together).**
- **Pattern 3:** ICS increases the reach and inclusion of services **by bridging the gap between communities and decision makers and making the most of community participation.**
- **Pattern 4:** ICS increases the reach of services **by amplifying existing messages and increasing short term functional capacity of organisations.**
- **Pattern 5:** ICS challenges social norms and practices **through the volunteer's presence which generates increased community interest in the project activities.**

Some degree of change was found across all projects, although the patterns of change were not necessarily consistent in every project.

The most visible difference between changes that ICS contributes to emerged between projects focusing on entrepreneurship development (in Kenya, Tanzania and some elements in Bangladesh) and the other ICS interventions (education, sexual and reproductive health, and livelihoods). While findings from projects focusing on education, sexual and reproductive health, and livelihoods confirmed most elements of the overarching theory of change, findings from the entrepreneurship projects demonstrated different outcomes and patterns of change for the target groups.

The evaluation found that working with other local volunteers (i.e. not ICS volunteers) and local community based organisations with established community relationships enabled young ICS volunteers to contribute

to more sustained positive changes. Whereas changes arising from volunteers directly delivering services and information to local communities appeared to be less effective and sustainable. Given the timescales of the interventions the evaluation looked at, it was not possible to assess the long term sustainability of change in all of the projects. This is an area which needs to be investigated some time after projects are complete.

This midterm evaluation contributes to the body of evidence on how youth volunteering can contribute to positive change and how this can be understood and evaluated. It has also revealed questions for further investigation and future research, such as the relationship between international and national volunteering, cross-cultural communication in short-term international volunteering programmes, and the long-term sustainability of changes in communities after volunteers depart.

The following insights from the evaluation have been highlighted for further discussion and in some cases further research.

- **Volunteers can amplify the reach of partner services** – Volunteers working to support existing partner services were able to increase the reach of services to more members of the community, including those from more marginalised groups.
- **Partnering with community volunteers** – This intervention has been key in developing sustainable and locally relevant solutions. Community volunteers have been especially effective in encouraging community participation, identifying marginalised groups and building trust between host communities and ICS. Community volunteers often also experience significant personal growth and play a key role in the longer-term ownership and sustainability of projects.
- **Entrepreneurship programmes** – Findings from projects focusing on education, sexual and reproductive health, and livelihoods have largely confirmed the overarching theory of change. However, ICS entrepreneurship demonstrated different outcomes and patterns of change for different target groups to those in other projects. The changes seen for entrepreneurs include the setting up of new businesses, increased business skills and improved confidence.
- **Power relations between UK and national volunteers** – The evaluation found evidence that at times, ICS placements experienced unequal power dynamics between UK volunteers and their in-country counterparts.
- **Use of Community Action Days (CADs)** – Community Action Days are organised during the placement and give volunteers the opportunity to join in activities with local community members. When CADs were arranged so as to complement programme goals they had a greater and more sustained impact than when they were used as a mechanism to try and increase community engagement.
- **M&E practices** – The evaluation found the programme's M&E frameworks and approaches useful in understanding ICS impact. Some weaknesses in M&E practices across the portfolio were identified, for example, some tools focused on measuring ICS activities rather than outcomes in the community.
- **Use of volunteers to directly deliver services and information** – The findings show that ICS placements need to be relevant for both skilled and unskilled young volunteers. The evaluation also found that volunteers benefit from strong partner or programme support and the quality of volunteer training can influence the impact of their placements.
- **Sustainability of changes** – The evaluation found changes were more long-term when placements included the close involvement of community volunteers who can continue after UK volunteers depart.

What next?

While the evaluation was undertaken as a learning and reflection process in itself, the initial data analysis in phase 1 led to the immediate revision of the ICS monitoring tools; and during the fieldwork, feedback was shared regularly with agencies and implementing partners allowing them the opportunity to revise aspects of projects and processes as they continue. In addition to this, at the end of the fieldwork for each project, an in-country feedback session was held with the relevant agency staff and other stakeholders, which gave all stakeholders the opportunity to embed the learning from the evaluation quickly. As a result, the ICS programme

have already visibly improved. Opportunities remain for reflection and discussion to embed the evaluation learning, particularly as agencies make changes to their projects and gather more evidence about the impact of those changes. The actions arising from the midterm evaluation will continue to increase ICS's impact and deliver positive change for poor and marginalised communities.