Introduction

International Citizen Service (ICS) brings together young people from the UK to volunteer side-by-side with young people from developing countries in some of the poorest communities in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The diversity of ICS volunteers allows for a unique sharing of ideas and perspectives. This brings about innovative collaboration on development projects aimed at achieving the sustainable development goals and ending poverty.

ICS is funded by the UK government and led by VSO, in partnership with respected development organisations. This year, 3,334 ICS volunteers took part in projects across Africa, Asia and Latin America as we celebrated our 37,000th volunteer to date. By the end of 2019, we will have supported 40,000 volunteers to help bring an end to poverty.

This report covers the achievements of ICS from April 2018 to March 2019.

ICS partners

Led by VSO, ICS is delivered by a consortium of eight development organisations:
How ICS works

Since 2011, ICS has brought together diverse teams of young volunteers to volunteer on projects aimed at ending poverty in some of the world’s poorest communities. Each team is made up of volunteers aged 18-25, from both the UK and the host country, and is supported by team leaders, who are aged up to 35.

Led by VSO, ICS is delivered by a consortium of eight development organisations. All volunteer placements contribute to:

- Poverty reduction and sustainable development
- Personal and social development of each volunteer
- Empowering young people to act as agents of change within their own communities and beyond.

ICS sets the benchmark for responsible, sustainable and inclusive youth volunteering-for-development. Our projects achieve clear results, contributing to long-term development impact. Our volunteers work across a wide range of projects, including livelihoods, health (including sexual and reproductive health), education, and civic participation. A strong focus on social accountability runs through our projects, strengthening the voice of communities, and empowering marginalised groups to access their rights.

Volunteers also embark on a personal development journey, supported at all stages of the programme to develop new and transferable skills. All volunteers receive ongoing training and learning, starting with a residential pre-placement training and continuing through to their post-placement debrief. The skills and professional development that volunteers experience help them enter the next stage of their life, whether that be further education or training, or progressing into their chosen career path.

Following their placement, ICS volunteers are required to complete at least one social action as part of their Action at Home – a project in their home community on a social issue of their choosing. Along with the experiences from their placement, this final phase of the programme harnesses a volunteer’s passion and enthusiasm as advocates for change and lifelong active citizens.

The ICS Theory of Change

Fundraising

As the first part of their ICS journey, UK volunteers are asked to fundraise. The UK government funds 90% of the ICS programme, with the other 10% coming from the money raised by volunteers.

Fundraising is an opportunity for volunteers to learn new skills, grow in confidence, and demonstrate their commitment to active citizenship. ICS volunteers often show their innovative and creative sides during their fundraising stage, and this year volunteers have held dance workshops, climbed Ben Nevis blindfolded, and joined forces for a multi-volunteer bucket collection in Birmingham.

This year, ICS volunteers in the UK raised over £1.76 million to support the ICS programme.

VSO ICS volunteer April organised several different activities for her fundraising, including a dance workshop, summer market stall and a car boot sale. However, raising awareness of ICS and her own fundraising through an article in the local press led to a donation of £250 from a reader, and another from a VSO returned volunteer, showing just how you never know where your next donation is going to come from!

Raleigh International ICS volunteer Liam organised two active fundraising opportunities before volunteering in Tanzania this year. He successfully summited Scarfell Pike, the highest mountain in the UK, and also abseilled down the Transporter Bridge in Middlesborough.
Since its inception in 2011, ICS has evolved and developed to become a leader in the youth volunteering-for-development sector. Through multiple large-scale evaluations and data collection, we have generated evidence of how ICS projects contribute to sustainable change in local communities and how ICS improves the confidence and personal resilience of our youth volunteers. ICS also develops the understanding we are confident that young people have the power to catalyse change and contribute to sustainable development outcomes across the areas of livelihoods, health, education, and civic participation.

Previous research by VSO identified the dimensions of change that volunteers experience when working with communities and local partners.

Livelihoods

1,801 volunteers
133 teams
16 countries

ICS livelihoods projects aim to increase the economic opportunities and self-sufficiency of communities, and particularly disadvantaged groups. Volunteers have facilitated the skills development of women and youth to help set up small businesses, and supported young people in accessing employment opportunities.

Health

548 volunteers
70 teams
9 countries

ICS health projects focus on improving access and awareness of health rights and services and promoting healthy practices among communities. ICS volunteers have raised awareness of the importance of good sanitation and hygiene practices and raised awareness of young people’s sexual health rights and services.

Education

674 volunteers
55 teams
11 countries

ICS education projects aim to improve access to education among disadvantaged groups in rural communities. Volunteers have supported the retention of school-aged children through extracurricular activities, and raised awareness of the rights of education access for disabled children.

Civic Participation

311 volunteers
28 teams
6 countries

ICS civic participation projects amplify the voices of marginalised groups in society, building awareness of people’s rights and their capacity to exercise control over decisions and resources. ICS volunteers have raised awareness of the rights of disabled people, and energised community participation in local decision making practices.

Sustainable development is at the heart of ICS. With a focus on livelihoods, education, health, and civic participation, in 2018-19 ICS volunteers have worked alongside local partners and community members to deliver sustainable development outcomes across 19 different countries. All our projects have a strong focus on social accountability, as ICS promotes the power of young people becoming agents of change in their own communities.

Through the ICS Mid-Term Evaluation, the pattern of change for ICS volunteers was identified, with the critical dimensions of change for the programme being:

- Participation and participatory practices
- Collaboration and networking
- Community ownership and agency
- Innovation and inspiration
- Inclusion

The following pages explore how these dimensions of change have enabled ICS volunteers to work alongside local communities in delivering sustainable development outcomes.
Participation and participatory practices
ICS volunteers promote the participation of community members by encouraging and modelling behaviour and approaches that place people at the heart of development.

Community ownership and agency
ICS volunteers strengthen local ownership and agency of people to take control of community development approaches.

Collaboration and networking
ICS volunteers promote and enable collaboration across the community and local organisations which increase community cohesion and networks.

Innovation and inspiration
ICS volunteers inspire new ways of thinking that encourage innovative and creative new approaches, and combine the best of ‘outside’ expertise with ‘inside’ knowledge.

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Restless Development ICS

VSO ICS

Y Care International ICS

Raleigh International ICS

Nepal
In Nepal, ICS volunteers successfully mobilised the creation of a youth club in the community of Gotikhel. The volunteers realised that all the members in the group were passionate about community mobilisation and had numerous ideas that they wanted to implement in the community, one of which was to address the issue of cyber-bullying in the community. They had recently got internet access and saw this as a problem. The group of volunteers worked closely with the members of the club to ensure that they were meeting regularly and encouraged them to speak with local stakeholders about addressing the issues they had seen in their community. The group spoke with the local Mayor who agreed to support the event. An event to raise awareness of the dangers of cyber-bullying was held, with community feedback reporting that they were extremely impressed by the passion and enthusiasm of the youth group to seek change in their community.

Kenya
In the community of Taita Taveta, ICS volunteers developed a partnership with a local disability rights organisation (Shigaro Special Unit), aiming to increase access to education for disabled people in the community. ICS volunteers were able to locate and identify local disabled youth who had left the education system, and facilitate training for them in an accessible learning environment, delivered by local experts. The training focused on soft skill development and practical skills such as tailoring, with adjustments made to the training to accommodate each individual's needs. Over 30 disabled people were also able to access the support necessary from the Shigaro Special Unit to complete their registration for disability identification, enabling to access support and services available to disabled people in the community.

Sierra Leone
In Sierra Leone, ICS volunteers worked in areas affected by the Ebola outbreak to rebuild stronger, more resilient communities. Activities involved ICS volunteers worked to change attitudes towards survivors of the disease with one community member saying that the community had started making peace with each other, with the hope of a long-term, positive impact for relations between community members. ICS volunteers also demonstrated the importance of taking ownership of healthy practices, and how this can lead to improved health outcomes for families. One town chief reported that his community had ‘gained a lot of information on health… and how to take care of themselves’.

Tanzania
In Magaseni, Tanzania, Raleigh International ICS volunteers inspire local communities to take ownership of their own health outcomes through educating healthy water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) practices. After the construction of new toilet blocks, ICS volunteers work with teachers and school management committees to encourage and develop new ways of teaching WASH practices to the school pupils. Volunteers also work with village elders and community leaders through Mobilisation Meetings, which are aimed at encouraging the whole community to adopt the healthy WASH practices and reinforcing the messages delivered to school children back in their homes. This combination of outside and inside knowledge has inspired teachers and communities to take ownership of encouraging healthy living and provided new innovative new teaching methods to school pupils, which in turn has led to increased adoption of healthy WASH practices.
ICS and inclusion

ICS is committed to inclusion both through and within our programmes. We offer a diverse range of young people the opportunity to participate as volunteers, and also ensure our programmes are reaching marginalised groups in the communities we work in. ICS volunteers work alongside disabled people, women and girls, and local youth to help build inclusive societies, often acting as role models and examples of the power of diversity in supporting sustainable development.

Inclusive Programming

The inclusion of disabled people in their communities remains an issue in many countries. Around 15% of the world’s population (one billion people) experience some form of disability, with most of these living in developing countries. Many ICS volunteers are placed in rural communities across developing countries, where the stigma regarding disability remains a clear obstacle in ensuring disabled people can access services and be aware of their rights. Since 2014, ICS has run projects purposefully targeting disability awareness, with the aim of reducing the stigma of disability and to build whole-community awareness of the rights and needs of disabled people.

Disability Programming in Ghana (REACT)

The eight-week REACT project, run by International Service ICS in Ghana, aimed to challenge disability stigma and champion disabled rights through the Paralympic team sport of Goalball. REACT brought together two teams of 25 sighted and visually impaired volunteers from Ghana and the UK, and a Team GB Paralympian, Georgie Bullen, to teach goalball to six communities, make sustainable goalball kits and organise a national goalball tournament – all to create more understanding of disability and visual impairment in northern Ghana.

“I am a member of the Tamale goalball team and we were lacking equipment to improve our goalball. Through this project I have learnt how to make equipment to facilitate goalball in place of using huge amount of money on same materials.”

Imoro Mahe – ICS volunteer

Volunteer Inclusion

ICS is committed to providing volunteering placements for all young people, regardless of their background. We believe that diverse groups of volunteers working together make a greater impact.

We understand that everyone is different, and that young people seek out opportunities through a variety of methods. We have introduced innovations to ensure that young people are able to access the opportunities that ICS provides young people today, such as the ICS Access Fund, which provides additional funding to meet the needs of volunteers that go beyond our existing commitment to inclusive volunteering.

On arriving there were a few things that were a bit hard – like setting up the mosquito net, which my counterpart kindly helped me with. Also, when I arrived at the training centre in Morogoro for induction, the jerry cans were very heavy, and to fill up my bottle without wasting a lot of water was a bit tricky. I got into the groove and found a technique that worked for me – for example lifting the bottle onto a step. We have a step in our homestay that I use to fill up my water bottle now. I would say my disability hasn’t been a problem – I’ve been able to adapt and it has not got in the way.

All disabilities are different, and I can’t speak for everyone, but I would say if your disability doesn’t affect your day-to-day life back home then I would encourage you to do ICS.”

James volunteered with Raleigh International in Tanzania and was born with Erb’s Palsy.

“It was very valuable for the school kids to work with the members of the team with disabilities, and […] to be taught by them so they can understand that just because you have a disability does not mean you are unable to teach and be a role model.”

Chris and Priscilla, ICS Team Leaders – REACT Project

ICS volunteers and community members celebrating the end of the REACT goalball tournament held at Tamale, Ghana.

The volunteers established six inclusive goalball teams and provided over 60 hours of goalball training to communities and local schools. They used recyclable materials to make sustainable goalball kits, bypassing the need to buy expensive equipment. It is hoped that with use of the equipment, the positive, inclusive message of Goalball will continue to challenge disability stigma.

Through participating in ICS, our volunteers are better able to understand the world they live in. The experience of living and working in a new community allows our volunteers to get a practical experience of international development, increasing their knowledge and understanding of the sector.

The experience of ICS also prepares volunteers for whatever they choose to do once their placement has finished. ICS volunteers are supported to build their soft skills in areas such as confidence, intercultural understanding, and resilience, recognising the importance of these areas in today’s world. These skills are essential in today’s world of work, preparing our volunteers with the transferrable skills and abilities that employers are asking for.

personal and professional development

From selection through to Action at Home and beyond, ICS volunteers experience a dedicated learning journey and are supported to develop crucial skills in preparation for the future. ICS volunteers are also given the opportunity to explore global issues and step outside of their comfort zones to challenge themselves and enhance their understanding of sustainable development and their role in achieving it.

77% of ICS volunteers identified personal development as one of the top 3 things they had achieved from their placement

80% of ICS volunteers were in further education, employment or training 1 year after placement

68% of volunteers say what they are doing now has been influenced by their ICS placement

Oscar volunteered on a health programme, working in schools and the community to increase healthy water and sanitation practices.

“Before volunteering on the programme, I was very introverted and didn’t have much confidence. I found tasks like leading and teaching to be extremely daunting, and I didn’t feel very capable of performing them. I also didn’t have a very strong awareness about development and my own role in making a difference. Before volunteering on ICS, I didn’t think that I as an individual could have an impact towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. I now know that anyone can have a direct or indirect effect on achieving these goals.

I decided to take part in ICS for three main reasons; I wanted to help my community; I wanted to improve my career interests; and, as I am soon to leave Tanzania to study a university course in the UK, I wanted more experience working in a team with UK volunteers so that I could integrate better within British culture. By doing ICS, I feel I have been able to fulfil all of these things.

Doing an ICS placement allowed me to learn so much about myself and discover who I really am. I know now that I am confident and adaptable. I am a teacher, I am a leader, and I am an active citizen of the world. My placements have shaped my views of myself, the world around me, and the future I want.”

Eva volunteered with VSO ICS in Uganda on a livelihoods programme after graduating from University.

“I joined the ICS programme at a time when I needed to grow myself as a person and be confident with my decision making and learn how to stand on my own in my life. I lost my mother in 2016 and this shook my world. ICS has empowered me to be bold and stand on my own. I lived with my host family and I have learned a lot about their different culture. Winfred, my host mother has been like a mother to me. Everyone here is welcoming and happy which is not the case in the UK where you barely talk to your neighbor.

“I had always wanted to do something with women and children. I have had the life changing opportunity of working with women without a voice, whose lives have been affected by the oil discovery in Hoima. They lost their land and were left with no resources to take care of their children. They are homeless. They shouldn’t be forgotten. We as a team have gone out to speak with the local officials to do something proactive for these women. Going to communities and meeting these women has made realize that their reality can be changed and I am happy to champion this change in the lives of such women.”

Raleigh International ICS

VS0 ICS
After finishing their placement, ICS volunteers continue their journey as active citizens by completing an Action at Home project. This gives volunteers an opportunity to put the skills they developed on placement into practice while advocating for change in their home communities. This journey into lifelong active citizenship is supported by ICS and alumni engagement is an ongoing priority for the programme.

Active citizenship
ICS volunteers are supported in a number of ways to continue their active citizenship. Action at Home activities encourage volunteers to begin their active citizenship journey, and is supported by staff at all ICS agencies. In-country alumni also have the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to £1000 to fund community development projects, and alumni from Nepal, Bangladesh and Tanzania can participate in their National Youth Engagement Network, a youth-led platform to inspire active citizenship in each country.

Across these two pages are some of the inspiring stories from our alumni network.

70% of ICS volunteers say they are more involved or engaged in different community activities 1 year after their placement.

In Tanzania, getting hold of trustworthy information about sexual health can be difficult. In response to this, a group of ICS alumni set up the ‘Contraceptive Conversation’ text line, an anonymous service connecting doctors with young people in the city to provide safe, free and reliable sexual health advice and confront the misconceptions.

Innocent Grant, one of the alumni, said:
“When we speak with them, we hear how they struggle to access services. We hear how they buy contraceptive pills without a prescription. We hear how they go through illegal abortions. A lot of them are getting the wrong information and because they’re scared to ask questions they follow the routes that are wrong for them. I hope that with the right information, these young people will be the political leaders and forward-thinking parents of the future.”

International Service ICS
For Elena, ICS was the inspiration to start living an eco-friendly life as an active citizen. Following her placement, Elena spent a year travelling through sustainability projects, including an eco-village in Wales and learning about living self-sufficiently. She now lives in rural Asturias in Spain where she moved to practice eco-living and deepen her understanding of permaculture.

“ICS was the first time I saw people living the life that I live now. We visited the communities where people were working together to live sustainably, and cooking food they’d grown themselves. ICS was the first time I thought of setting up an eco-community. If I hadn’t done ICS, I wouldn’t have this world view that I have now: I wouldn’t want to live closer to the earth and I wouldn’t be hoping to set an eco-community one day.”

VSO ICS

NYEN Bangladesh
In Dhaka, public transport is an unpleasant – and often dangerous – experience, especially if you’re a woman or girl. Members of the National Youth Engagement Network in Bangladesh are working to address this. Over four days, they put stickers on more than 500 public vehicles informing women of a government helpline to help them access justice for the harassment they face.

Atika, a member of NYEN Bangladesh said:
“We wanted to run a campaign to make women and girls aware of how the service can help them. We printed hundreds of stickers with the phone number and a message about their right to not have to face violence – and set out to put these all over public transport in Dhaka city centre. We also appeared on four national radio stations to talk about our campaign. It was hard to convince them why it was important – but what ICS taught me was that networking and linkages have power! I hope their female listeners will now be more confident in calling out harassment.”

Y Care International ICS
Without birth certificates, it is often difficult for children to continue their education in Togo. ICS alumnus, Matthieu, recognised this, and focused his attention on raising the awareness amongst adults in the community of the importance of having this important documentation for their children. Through this activity, Matthieu was able to promote the importance of inclusive and quality education for all, in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

“In initiated this project of establishing birth certificate because people are not well informed about the different types of identity documents… There are some pupils who don’t go to exam for lack of a birth certificate. Through my activity I sensitized more than 350 parents about the different identity papers.”
In 2018, ICS volunteers across 13 countries joined together to celebrate the successes of ICS to date. All the events were led by ICS alumni. The UK event was held in Birmingham, with a Youth Steering Committee recruited to co-design the day, which included participatory workshops delivered by VSO, WaterAid and Oxfam, amongst others. Other events were held in Rwanda, Malawi, Uganda, Malawi, Burkina Faso, Nepal, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Celebrating our successes

ICS volunteers in Burkina Faso organised a conference on the importance of volunteering.

ICS alumni at the ICS Celebration Event in Birmingham

Demonstrating sector leadership

ICS is regularly demonstrating its leadership in the youth volunteering-for-development sector, with both alumni and staff representing the programme internationally at the UN and at home at the DFID Disability Summit. We have also presented on the programme at international non-governmental organisation conferences and summits, and produced high quality research to contribute to the sector’s understanding of youth and volunteering.

ICS alumni at the ICS Celebration Event in Birmingham

This year ahead

Promoting responsible volunteering

ICS is proud of our record in providing responsible volunteering projects for young people across the UK, Africa and Asia. Responsible volunteering means that our projects are helping the most marginalised and poor in society, and our agencies work directly with partners and community members to only implement projects that are needed. This year, we will continue to promote our work as a responsible volunteering provider.

Evidencing the power of volunteering

Over the next year we will conclude two large research projects, with our latest Impact Evaluation and a Social Return on Investment Evaluation. We are committed to using these to demonstrate the power of youth volunteering-for-development across the UK and abroad, and to celebrate the achievements of our volunteers to date.

Promoting diversity

Diversity is at the heart of ICS and throughout the next year we aim to learn more about the opportunities that arise when we have diverse teams of volunteers. Through improved data collection and analysis, we will continue to ensure the programme is accessible to all and that we are able to remove any barriers to participation for applicants.

Deepening our impact

We will continue to develop an understanding of where and how youth volunteers can be best utilised as agents of change. Through a review into our Livelihood programming we will ensure that young people’s skills and abilities are being used in the best way in this sector. And through a relaunch of our ICS Alumni Grant, we will be able to evidence the work of our alumni in their home communities, delivering for people across Africa and Asia.

When Sarah Boateng, 24, left the UK to volunteer in her family’s home country of Ghana on a project tackling disability stigma, she didn’t expect a chance encounter to change her career path. Motivated by the discrimination in West Africa, this year she ended up at the UN where she presented her ideas for making education more inclusive.

“When I came back to the UK, I felt lost. I knew I wanted to do something, but I didn’t know what. I heard about the upcoming UN Summit in Geneva on the Rights of the Child and decided to try and volunteer there so I could network and make new contacts. I was later invited to come to the UN to speak on the rights of indigenous children. I’d been researching what special educational needs (SEN) support is available in the West African country of Niger. It’s basically non-existent. With a population of 21 million, there are just six SEN schools. None are designed for children with mental disabilities. It was the opportunity I’d been looking for. I spoke in front of a room of 800 people about indigenous children and the importance of continuing their education, and how it should be taught in their local language.”

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