Responsible and Impactful Volunteering

Synthesis Report

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Executive Summary

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) and VSO in a leading role have developed the Global Standard for Volunteering in Development. As part of VSO's organisational commitment to implement quality standards in volunteering, a learning study was carried out in 2021 that identified the complexity of the Global Standard and hence, the need for its simplification to be used, particularly by smaller Global South VIOs. Therefore, VSO has developed the **Responsible & Impactful Volunteering (R&I) Index** to establish best practice across VSO projects in volunteering and to learn the extent of progress towards specific volunteering indicators related to design, implementation and measurement that are evident in VSO-supported projects.

To achieve this vision, the R&I Index was developed and administered in four countries, to start with: **Cambodia, Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe**. Four research assistants or teams based in the participating countries, familiar with VSO and volunteering for Development (VfD), documented the implementation of the Index, prepared a scalar table (based on globally prescribed indices) against each indicator, and synthesised information to produce a country report. This is the first year of implementation and as such constitutes a pilot of the Index process. It is anticipated that changes will be made to the tool and process for the subsequent two years of the study.

The country reports allow to carve out themes and patterns that will inform capacity-building activities with partner organisations over the next twelve months:

- All assessed organisations and projects are particularly strong on the **"designing and planning"** pillar. Across the evaluated organisations and projects, the voice and inputs from the target community are represented in designing interventions and volunteer activities.

- While most organisations are committed to promoting **a better environment, climate adaptation, and safeguarding marginalised and vulnerable groups**, several organisations within the four countries reported difficulties meeting the indicator due to the lack of resources.

- The results of the **"duty of care" pillar** vary between organisations. While some more established organisations reached very high scores, others still need to work on a range of issues regarding the indicators of that pillar. The findings suggest a weakness in providing or developing adequate **risk mitigation systems, child protection, safeguarding policies, guidelines, and materials**.

- Regarding **measuring impact,** the findings suggest an overall good performance across the countries except for the two assessed organisations in Zimbabwe.

- Most organisations face only minor challenges in meeting the requirements of the **"managing volunteers" pillar.** This might be due to the nature of the selected organisations and their involvement with VSO and/or VfD.

VSO was also keen to see if the R&I Index, as a contextualisation of the Global Standard, can be implemented at the project level and may be more helpful for applying a minimum standard for Responsible & Impactful Volunteering. While the answer to this question is mainly yes, there remain a couple of difficulties regarding the Index and its application with smaller Global South VIOs:

- Even though the Index reduced the complexity of the Global Standard, some parts are still less applicable or relevant in some settings, based on the design, context and type of volunteer project in which the Index is being adopted.

- Some of the metrics will remain aspirational for smaller Global South VIOs. For example, the requirement to include climate adaptation approaches into all activities. The report hints to the

dilemma between what might be important or desirable and what is possible for certain organisations and projects.

- Smaller organisations with limited resources are more likely to struggle to go through an assessment process and develop and implement the necessary policies and practices.

- The R&I index has already made progress by reducing the Global Standard. Still, the level of complexity of such indices and their relevance and applicability for smaller Global South VIOs remains an issue to work on in future.

Introduction

The International Forum for Volunteering in Development (Forum) and VSO in a leading role have developed the Global Standard for Volunteering in Development1. This "Global Standard" is a voluntary standard of practice that Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) may adopt to improve the outcomes of volunteering for development (V4D) activities, ensuring that organisations that work through and with volunteers are both impactful and responsible in their practice and that V4D programmes are developed in partnership with local communities. The Global Standard results from a three-year collaborative process, launched in 2019 and revised in 2021.

As part of VSO's organisational commitment to implement quality standards in volunteering a learning study was carried out in 2021 across five VSO country programmes. The learning study identified the complexity of the Global Standard and hence, the need for its simplification to be used, particularly by smaller Global South VIOs. Therefore, VSO has developed the Responsible & Impactful Volunteering (R&I) Index to establish best practice across VSO projects in volunteering and to learn the extent of progress towards specific volunteering indicators related to design, implementation and measurement that are evident in VSO-supported projects. The R&I index is contextualised to be implemented by smaller volunteer involving organisations, this has included selecting a reduced set of indices. Some of these indices are derived from the core indicators of the Global Standard, and others have been added based on VSO's own experience of partnering with and supporting smaller VIOs in VSO's 18 operating countries. Indicators have been derived from the Global Standard based on the result of the aforementioned learning study. The Index follows the Global Standard's division into four interconnected Themes:

1. **Designing & Delivering Projects**
2. **Duty of Care**
3. **Managing Volunteers**
4. **Measuring Impact**

VSO is keen to take another learning journey to see if the adapted contextualised version of the Global Standard (hereafter referred to as the R&I Index) can be implemented at project-level and may be more helpful for applying a minimum standard for Responsible & Impactful Volunteering.

VSO is keen to understand the extent to which VSO-supported projects, implemented in collaboration with VSO partners, meet these criteria, to identify and document best practice, and to determine where additional support may be required, either within VSO country programmes or the partners that VSO works with.

To achieve this vision, the R&I Index was administered in four countries, to start with: **Cambodia, Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe**. These are countries with established projects where it is possible to develop a longitudinal understanding of VSO's progress in implementing responsible and impactful volunteering over three years.

Four research assistants or teams based in the participating countries, familiar with VSO and volunteering for Development (VfD), documented the implementation of the Index, prepared a scalar table (based on globally prescribed indices) against each indicator, and synthesised information to produce a country report. This contextualised version is comprised of indices that can be answered at organisational level, as well as others that are project related.

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[1] https://forum-ids.org/global-volunteering-standard/

Based on these reports the lead researcher has developed the here presented synthesis study that summarises and analyses the implementation of the R&I index at country/project level. Furthermore, it identifies trends, patterns, and improvement actions across the four countries.

The report's main aim is to build evidence and insight about volunteer planning and practice derived from implementation of the R&I Index. The findings in this report will inform and guide future actions of VSO and projects. The R&I Index is also intended to contribute to the wider V4D sector, beyond VSO. This report is therefore designed as a pilot evaluation aiming at carving out recommendations that are also of value for other organisations in the sector.

This is the first year of implementation and as such constitutes a pilot of the Index process. It is anticipated that changes will be made to the tool and process for the subsequent two years of the study.

Methodology

This index study is the result of a collaborative process between VSO, research assistants and the lead researcher from October 2022 to April 2023. Next to a continuous exchange and communication within the team to discuss progress, challenges and results of the country studies, the research design consisted of the following elements:

Research Design

1. **Literature and index review:** The lead researcher systematically reviewed the 2021 learning study and familiarised himself thoroughly with the R&I Index. Based on this he got involved in the preparation of the research assistants.

2. **Training and preparation of research assistants:** All research assistants have been trained by VSO staff on the Index and how to apply the scalar table. Preparatory online meetings between the assistants, VSO and the lead researcher aimed to eliminate uncertainties and to assure a comparable procedure in all four countries. Also, the lead researcher drafted a common template for the country reports to assure a comparable structure and data presentation.

3. **Sampling:** In order to test if the reduced set of indices of the R&I index is more helpful for application of minimum standard on project level, one or two organisations or projects per country were selected by VSO and the research assistants. Some of the selected VIOs have already worked with or on the Global Standard, and some of them are involved in VSO's ACTIVE programme[2], others are not. All of them are youth-related organisations or projects. Hence, the sample consists of a diverse group of organisations and projects, representing the diversity of different smaller Global South VIOs supported by VSO. The selection of projects within the four countries has been informed by the planned capacity-building related to the Global Standard.

4. **Data collection:** The research assistants and teams collected data in the four selected countries between February and March 2023. Based on the R&I Index an Excel assessment tool was developed covering all indicators of the Index. Next to the assessment questions for each indicator, the tool asks for respective evidence (e.g. documents, work plans, or numbers) and includes a heat map (green, yellow, red) for each indicator, which provides a quantitative insight into what extent an organisation meets the expectations of the four different pillars of the Index.

5. **Preliminary review of scalar tables and country reports:** All country reports were revised thoroughly by the lead researcher to develop systematic insights into the scalar tables and findings by the four research assistants/teams. This knowledge informed the development of the final research methodology. Clarification questions were sent out to the four assistants/teams by the lead researcher to ensure the correct understanding of the details of their reports.

6. **Systematic analysis of the primary data and country reports:** The systematic analysis of the primary data and country reports formed the central pillar of the assignment. Following the logic of the R&I Index and the sections on project design, implementation and measurement, the analysis identified trends, patterns, and improvement actions in implementing the Index. First, the analysis focused on a project and country level, second, a cross-country analysis aimed to identify global trends and patterns that speak to VSO's approach and the R&I Index implementation overall. The indicators and the different sections of the Index guided the

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[2] https://www.vsointernational.org/our-work/active

analysis. As the R&I Index is a mix of qualitative and simple quantitative indicators, the synthesis study applied mainly systematic content analysis for the qualitative parts by using a general coding method to identify topics and patterns across the different country reports. The quantitative results produced by the heat map were included into the analysis and will be used to track progress against the particular indicators and sections in future.

The aim of the analysis is to allow an overall consolidation of the primary data and a cross-country analysis. This will enable VSO to reflect on implementing the R&I Index and improving actions on the ground.

Sample of Assessed Organisations

Cambodia: In Cambodia the VMC project was selected to be assessed. Established in 2019 and supported by VSO Cambodia since 2020, VMC is the largest national programme for volunteering and community outreach in Cambodia. It is led by a government agency and aims to provide young volunteers the opportunities to learn how to initiate, formulate and implement projects to develop their communities.

Different key persons in charge of VMC have been interviewed for the country report, including the programme manager and an office chief of the volunteering work.

Malawi: In Malawi the organisation Common Path (COPA) was assessed. COPA was founded in 2017 and is a registered youth led organisation comprised of 23 members. The organisation is run by youth volunteers, who have received significant education and training in leadership, good governance and advocacy. All the youth are engaged as volunteers.

Nepal: In Nepal 4 different partner organisations were considered in the assessment:

- Youth Advocacy Nepal (YAN): The organisation works in the field of democracy, peace, human rights, sustainable development and youth empowerment and works currently with more than 300 volunteers.
- Aasaman Nepal (ASN): VSO Nepal has partnered with ASN to implement the health component of the ACTIVE project in two districts. Currently, Aasaman runs 34 different projects and collaborates closely with local institutions and authorities.
- The National Farmers Group Federation (NFGF): An umbrella organisation of farmers' groups advocating for the rights of marginalised, disadvantaged, women and small farmers throughout the country. The organisation is mobilising community and youth volunteers to address the challenges faced by farmers from marginalised communities.
- Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC):An NGO that works nationwide, lead and managed by youth committed to development. Currently, VSO Nepal has a partnership with JJYC for the Education related activities under the education component of ACTIVE project, for which it has mobilised community volunteers.

Zimbabwe: In Zimbabwe two organisations were selected to be assessed:

- The first is VIONET, a network of VIOs coming together to share their community of practice in their different thematic groups. VIONET is made up of different community based volunteering groups and community based organisations working on different Sustainable Development Goals.
- Higher Life Foundation (HLF): HLF was established in 1996 and is dedicated to supporting orphaned and vulnerable children in Africa through education and material support. HLF works with youth volunteers who usually have just finished High School or are still studying and who take on community-based group tasks.

Limitations

While the selected organisations are somewhat reflective of VSO's effort to build capacity in this certain country, they do not represent the overall work of VSO in those countries. As a pilot and exemplary study that aims to test the reduced set of indices, they can only represent a limited segment of VSO's overall activities. The main aim of the sample was to represent a diverse group of smaller VIOs. In other words: While the sampling allows to draw important conclusions on organisational and project level, at this stage it does not allow for country-level conclusions.

As the Index covers high level issues such as policies and strategies, as well as implementation and practical issues of direct work with volunteers and communities, for some research assistants it was sometimes challenging to identify the most suitable respondent within the participating organisations. This is to be expected given the diverse nature of organisations and the extent to which they are formalised with policies and systems in place.

The country reports on Malawi and Nepal assessed VSO together with their partner organisations but did not present the results consistently. This creates potential of a certain bias for those findings and might have also influenced the overall scores.

Some country researchers encountered communication and logistical challenges, for instance due to a cyclone in Malawi. Some interviews were therefore conducted online which reduced the possibilities to ask for respective evidence documents for certain indicators.

Country Results

As a first step, the report will analytically summarise the findings on the level of the assessed organisations/projects within the four research countries. The aim of this section is to document best practice and identify where additional support is needed for the assessed organisations/programmes. The then following section no. 4 ties these findings together and aims to carve out trends, patterns, and improvement actions across the four countries that helps to VSO to plan future action across their programmes.

CAMBODIA

Pillar 1: Designing and Planning

The overall performance of the evaluated programme regarding designing and planning is **73% overall,** quite good and **requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

Before implementing a project, youth volunteers are asked to consult local authorities, community members and other relevant stakeholders to identify and analyse the needs or issues to be addressed in the community. This information has to be documented. Only a small number of VMC projects in specific areas were identified that did not fully follow these procedures. Institutional support by the programme and official authorities is given to make sure volunteers receive adequate information, e.g., on drug misuse or student dropouts in a certain region. One informant described that community members sometimes reject youth volunteers or their contributions. This results in an external constraint to include voices from the target community into project design. Most volunteer-led projects engage primary actors and community members also in the implementation of their activities.

When it comes to building structures for sustainable development results one has to consider, that volunteer-led activities within VMC are mostly small projects that often are attempts of new approaches and if successful, can serve as a lesson for local authorities and the government. While

volunteers are required to align their project proposals with government policies and community development plans to engage local authorities and ensure sustainability, sometimes the complexity of local administration in Cambodia is a barrier to achieving this. Often, the commitment by a certain stakeholder to ensure the sustainability of the projects depends on the nature of the activity and its outcomes. For example, if volunteers build a community library, the sustainability depends on the school or the community to take over after the project finishes. Volunteers are requested to seek support from a local authority to ensure the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Interviewed VMC representatives reported on a discrepancy between community needs and some values promoted by the R&I index, that are also reflected in volunteer interests. While volunteers – in line with the standard – are eager to implement projects protect and promote better environment and climate adaptation, most communities prefer education or agriculture related projects. Furthermore, even though the programme is committed to providing training regarding climate change and green development, there is a lack of technical skills and resources.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of the evaluated programme regarding duty of care is **37%,** classified as low and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

The assessment identified specific issues that the VMC programme needs to address to meet the requirements in this section. While a programme guideline mentions safety and security the interviewed people admitted that VMC has to improve their policies and procedure to address this issue. While VMC representatives show a strong commitment to developing such policies and procedures they struggle with technical support and lack resources for implementation. Volunteers are informed about health and safety issues; however, these are not a priority in their trainings.

The programme guideline mentions how to avoid the risks for volunteers, individuals, team members and the community, and includes some guidance how to respond to such risks. Still, no clear procedures are in place to respond to risks if they really occur.

Regarding *up-to-date risk assessments, mitigation, and contingency plans* to be used in the volunteer pre placement training and volunteers consent to placement, the report identified major room for improvement. Volunteers can report safety and health issues to VMC, however, no formal plans are in place. There are no mechanisms in place for community members to report risks or safety issues.

Staff and volunteers are made aware of and inducted on organisations' safeguarding policies or guidelines to adhere to and report against any violation.

As no official safeguarding policies or guidelines are in place, most indicators regarding this topic were flagged as "red" in the heat map. The same applies for measures and structures for child protection. VMC reported that this is mainly due to the lack of human and financial resources. However, VMC showed strong commitment to develop those measures.

Regarding safe recruitment, obtaining professional references and undertaking criminal background checks for all staff and volunteers, most requirements are met. The only outstanding action is that questions to be included in interviews that relate to safeguarding are still to be developed.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the evaluated programme regarding measuring impact is **50%** and **suggests some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

While primary actors have been involved in the development of change indicators to measure outcomes, community members and stakeholders do not yet take part in collection of monitoring data. VMC measures the changes in youth capacity, community development and institutional capacity development every year and has a framework in place to evaluate the program. Still, due to limited human resources and capacity, the framework is not implemented consistently, and documentation is not carried out consistently. Respondents indicated that administrative workload is too high to allow VMC to focus on these issues.

The same challenge applies to project (progress/end) reports with feedback from marginalised and vulnerable people/communities. Usually, VMC has a monthly meeting with development partners to share the progress of implementation. It can be online or in person. However, it is still a challenge to include the primary actors into these procedures. Hence, no full participatory monitoring and evaluation system is in place.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the evaluated programme regarding managing volunteers is **77%** and **requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

Recruitment is carried out in a transparent, equitable, and fair manner. The recruitment steps are very detailed, and age is the only major initial selection factor. Some provincial volunteers that recruited by the Department of Education, Youth and Sport, are nominated from the school and therefore the positions are not publicly advertised.

All relevant documents and guidelines are sent to the volunteers, or they can find them on the VMC website. It is written in Khmer and therefore easy to understand.

Volunteers receive relevant and adequate training pertaining to their placement. Most of them are residents of where they are placed. Thus, they are fully immersed into the community where they implement their projects.

VMC volunteers are not informed about the living cost in where they are placed. Given the design of the project and the fact that VMC volunteers stay at their family homes, this section of the Index is not relevant.

Collective performance review sessions for each volunteer placement involving community members/primary actors are not planned or carried out. For VMC with its high numbers of volunteers, this would hardly be possible. The standard "Volunteer performance and impact are assessed with documented, periodic, collective reflections by community members, volunteers, and project staff" is therefore not met, but also poses the question, if such standards can really be met by all types of organisations or programmes in the same way.

Summary assessment for Cambodia:

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Designing and Planning	73%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	37%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	50%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	77%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards

Hence, while the Cambodian project is particularly strong in designing projects with participation, voice and inputs from the target community, there is room for improvement regarding implementing participatory practices for measuring impact.

VMC needs to improve significantly to be able to meet the indices within the pillar of duty of care. While many aspects are informally in place, they seem not yet standardised or formally adopted.

MALAWI

The assessment in Malawi has put the implementation of the ACTIVE programme together with one of the involved partner organisations at the centre of inquiry. Therefore, the results speak to both levels: One, to VSO Malawi's approach and activities and their general collaborations with the local partner organisation. Second, to how COPA implements their volunteering activities.

Pillar 1: Designing and Planning

The overall performance of the evaluated organisation regarding designing and planning is **67%** and requires **only some improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

During the planning of projects primary actors are involved through co-creation workshops to identify outcomes and indicators for the project, resulting in a shared vision and potential for sustainability. However, time constraints sometimes hamper the endeavour to meet this criterion fully.

Technical working groups and district executive committee meetings aim to ensure the building of sustainable structures. Regarding building structures and collectives of marginalised and vulnerable groups/communities, for sustainable development results, the report highlights the health component under the ACTIVE programme and how the planning ensures the provision of essential health services and its efforts to engage communities in the planning and implementation of these services.

For the other indicators under this section, the report does not provide enough evidence as the scores between VSO and the partner organisation are combined. Therefore, the informative value of the overall score is also limited.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of the partner organisation (COPA) regarding duty of care is **26%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

Safety and security guidelines, protecting marginalised and vulnerable people within project scope, have been identified within COPA's constitutions, volunteer policy and code of conduct. However, COPA, does not provide induction training to its staff and volunteers due to lack training and financial support.

While VSO has made its safeguarding policies and guidelines publicly available, COPA does not have accessible safeguarding and child protection policies or guidelines. This means that staff and volunteers do not have access to the documents that outline the policies and procedures related to safeguarding and child protection. The reasons stated by COPA were lack of qualified personnel, leadership capacity, and technical know-how on policy formulation.

COPA has defined roles for responding to abuse, but due to the lack of resources they are not always fulfilled. The findings suggest that COPA allows volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential care facilities for children based on observation. Safe recruitment, professional reference and criminal background checks are not consistently conducted for all staff and volunteers. The organisation does not appear to check the identification documents of staff and volunteers as part of the recruitment process.

Furthermore, the report states that staff and volunteers are not required to sign off a code of conduct. In addition, not all staff and volunteers are trained on their roles, responsibilities, and procedures for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and gender-based violence.

These results suggest COPA needs to improve their own processes and systems to ensure that the indices for duty of care are met. Given that the organisation is fully run by volunteers, they might rather focus on delivering projects and activities than on institutional issues. However, this constitutes a major risk for the integrity of volunteering practice.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the evaluated programme and its partner organisations regarding measuring impact is **83%** and **requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

There is not enough evidence that a set of change indicators to measure progress throughout the project has been developed with primary actors. The report only states that COPA has a logical framework in place, to measure progress.

VSO/partners have established and provided training to relevant project staff and volunteers on primary actor inclusive processes for data collection and routine monitoring of data as well as evaluations, as planned in a project.

VSO Malawi has provided MILE training to COPA staff, volunteers, community members, and relevant stakeholders on participatory project monitoring processes. The training was aimed at enhancing the capacity of these stakeholders to effectively monitor and evaluate project activities and outcomes, and to learn from the monitoring data collected. These practices have not been fully implemented after training.

For the other indicators under this section, the report does not provide enough evidence. Therefore, the informative value of the overall score is also limited.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the evaluated organisation regarding managing volunteers is reported as **55%, and requires some improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

The report states that VSO Malawi has a documented volunteer policy, which is a set of guidelines and procedures that govern the engagement, management, and support of volunteers in the organisation. While VSO also has a documented guideline for volunteer recruitment, COPA has no clear framework for screening and scoring candidates.

There is no documented evidence of the process followed to screen, shortlist, score, and provide feedback to candidates. Given the organisation is volunteer-led, the emphasis may be on the community development activities rather than on institutional processes and procedures. These findings—similarly to those for the duty of care section—suggest there is need for capacity-building and advocacy on the importance of ensuring good volunteer practice.COPA sends out an information package with documents to their volunteers.

The organisation has had challenges to evaluate volunteers' performance in ensuring that they are contributing to the community in a positive and meaningful way. There is no documented, or periodic performance reviews in place. COPA has not established a process for volunteer debriefs post placement.

For the other indicators under this section, the report does not provide enough evidence. Therefore, the informative value of the overall score is also limited.

Assessment Summary for Malawi:

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Designing and Planning	67%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	26%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	83%	Most recommended requirements are met
4) Managing Volunteers	55%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards

NEPAL

The assessment in Nepal has put the implementation of the ACTIVE programme and four involved partner organisations at the centre of inquiry. Therefore, the results speak in general to VSO Nepal's approach and activities and their general collaborations with the four local partner organisations. The country report does not provide results on the level of the implementing partner organisations. Hence, while the findings offer some valuable insights into VSO Nepal's performance regarding the R&I index, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the extent to which VSO-supported projects are meeting these criteria. The overall report does not provide enough evidence is to draw conclusions about each of the four different organisations and their performance regarding the standard.

Pillar 1: Designing and Planning

The general results from Nepal for designing and planning lead to an overall score in this section of **67%, suggesting some improvements are required** to meet the standard.

On a programme level, projects are designed with participation, voice and inputs from the target community. Primary actors are always involved and consulted during project design, while learning and evidence documents sometimes inform the project design. Also on a general level, one can say that VSO's activities, carried out together with the four partner VIOs, build structures and collectives of marginalised communities for development results – another important indicator under this first pillar.

Whereas in the field of promoting a better environment and climate adaptation the findings suggest room for improvement. While conserving the environment is a shared value among VSO supported projects, VSO Nepal itself and partner organisations do not calculate their carbon footprint. Budget deficits have been identified as the major obstacle to implementing more climate related activities. Where funds and resources are available, measures are carried out and the activities meet the respective criteria of the Index.

Regarding the questions around volunteers having the opportunity to participate in project design and planning as equal actors, the country report explains: *"While all project members are aware of the project outcomes, volunteers are not empowered to make decisions regarding their roles, programme modalities or project implementation. Volunteers provide technical inputs and support the project implementations. As most volunteers are in a learning and understanding phase, their current role does not include decision-making. However, their expertise has supported during the planning process, and they are preparing themselves to make certain decisions."*

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of the evaluated programme and its partner organisations regarding duty of care is with **78%,** regarded as quite good and **requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

VSO Nepal and the assessed partner organisations have documented safety and security policies or guidelines in place. Volunteers in the ACTIVE programme have been made aware of potential risks to community members and themselves, however, they did not receive training on safety and security policies and guidelines, as the standard requests.

The report does not provide evidence as to the *availability of public safeguarding policies and guidelines that anyone can access and understand* as well as *safeguarding materials at community level* The commitment to child protection which includes measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse, has been identified as being positive on all levels. The identification of local organisations or government agencies that can support in responding to safeguarding cases is still in process. During the ACTIVE project cycle, VSO Nepal organises the partner organisation's capacity assessment including the organisational documentation system and recordings. In this regard, VSO including all partner organisations do have a child protection policy, measures and structure and guide the project team during the programme implementation.

All organisations conduct safe recruitment, obtain professional references and criminal background checks for all staff and volunteers. Also, following the report, induction, and training regarding the code of conduct speaking to staff and volunteers expected behaviours and obligations around safeguarding, prevention, mandatory reporting and response to sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and gender-based violence is in place across all VSO Nepal partner organisations.

VSO Nepal and their partner organisations have systems in place to reduce the potential impact of the placement on volunteers' health and wellbeing before, during and after the placement. While the system is considered to be generally robust, the report identifies some areas of concern: Pre-placement training on seeking mental health support and on dealing with stress as well as support for community volunteers are not in place in all organisations.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the evaluated programme and its partner organisations regarding measuring impact is **79%** and **requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

While the results on this pillar suggest that most indicators are fulfilled by VSO Nepal and the assessed partner organisations, mainly the involvement of primary actors in developing a set of change indicators to measure progress and thereby enable the communities to take part in collection of monitoring data needs further attention. *"The participation of these stakeholders is minimal and subsequently their voice is not fully considered",* states the report. Furthermore, the assessment showed that community members and volunteers are not included in day-to-day monitoring of the projects.

The integration of primary actors in the evaluation of certain project outcomes has been identified as limited. And primary actors so far were not involved in day-to-day routines monitoring of project implementation.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the evaluated programme and its partner organisations regarding managing impact is reported as **91%, most requirements to meet the recommended standards met. However, the score is not consistent with the qualitative report of this section. The following section includes some issues that actually suggest a lower overall score.**

The findings of this section suggests that best practice is in place within VSO Nepal and its partner organisations across the different indicators regarding managing volunteers. Only some weaknesses have been identified such as some inconsistencies in job descriptions and in remuneration across national and community volunteers. For example, community volunteers receive stipends/ remunerations in the form of monthly soap allowances, while other volunteer stipends are guided by the other organisations in which they are engaged. The general standard however is transport and lunch allowance to cover the month. This however is not always provided.

VSO conducts post placement debriefs with volunteers, however there is no established process for this in VSO and other partner organisations within the ACTIVE programme.

Summary assessment for Nepal:

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Designing and Planning	67%	Some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	78%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	79%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards.

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
4) Managing Volunteers	91%	Most recommended requirements are met

The research team observed that under the ACTIVE programme, VSO is much more established and set with policies and practices as outlined in four pillars of Global Volunteering Standard as opposed to some smaller partner organisations. It has structures and systems in place ready to address any mishaps and challenges they may face. Safeguarding and child protection policies exist though there are no specific roles assigned to administer the roles.

ZIMBABWE

The Index was administered with two organisations in Zimbabwe, given the extensive network of VIOs that VSO works with, and the relationships that VSO has with these organisations and partners. The first organisation, VIONET is a network of VIOs in Zimbabwe. It is a membership-based body where VIOs collaborate and communicate around a range of issues around volunteering and development. It is distinct from HLF as it does not directly design and implement projects, for this reason, aspects of the Index may not be relevant to their own work, explaining their lower scores in some areas. HLF an education-related NGO that works with local volunteers. The results of both will be presented one after the other, organised by section of the index.

Pillar 1: Designing and Planning

The overall performance of Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) Zimbabwe regarding designing and planning indicates with **53%** that **some improvements are required to meet the recommended standard.**

VIONET sometimes involves primary actors in the designing of their projects by applying different tools such as power mapping. Results from these are used as evidence and feed into the proposal development phase. Additionally, some learning and evidence documents such as activity reports, assessment reports are used to inform the project design. However, these exercises are mostly done as part of requirements by funders and not consistently as best practice.

VIONET implements projects that are designed to address the needs of primary actors and to ensure inclusivity. Projects that are implemented include plans to equip primary actors and volunteers with skills to be able to engage authorities and duty bearers. These are stipulated in the project log frames. VIONET offers policy support and trains volunteers and primary actors on advocacy and lobbying.

VIONET's interventions protect and promote better environment, climate adaptation, and safeguarding of marginalised and vulnerable groups to a limited extent. Member organisations do not calculate their carbon footprint. However, they do implement activities that conserve nature and reduce harm to the environment. Threats to the environment are identified periodically and mitigation measures are drafted. Often these are difficult to implement as most of the organisations operate on a very low budget. Several members have already implemented climate related projects such as recycling of plastic packages into food warmers and coolers or transformative agro-ecology farming and tree planting.

The network demonstrates an enabling environment in which volunteers feel equal actors alongside staff and partners, in implementation decisions within their respective remit. All project members including staff are made aware of the projects desired outcomes and they are organised to work together as a team to achieve them. Working committees with project staff and stakeholders involved exist, WhatsApp groups and regular meetings are conducted to ensure the effectiveness of the teams in realising the outcomes. However, while all project members are aware of the intended project outcomes, the findings suggest that volunteers are not always empowered to make decisions relating to their particular roles. Volunteers are viewed as lacking the requisite skills to make certain decisions.

A majority of VIONET's members do not have specific job descriptions to outline the roles of volunteers, they are just expected to be "all-rounders", that engage where their services are needed.

The overall performance of HLF Zimbabwe regarding designing and planning indicates with **87%** that **only some improvements are required to meet the recommended standard.**

HLF fulfils almost all requirements regarding the indicators of this section. Only two minor weaknesses have been identified. One, the organisation does not measure carbon footprint resulting from project related travel and second, primary actors are currently not involved in day to day routine monitoring of project implementation. Regarding all other indicators, HLF can be seen as a best practice example with high quality standards in designing and planning.

HLF's programme portfolio suggest that they build structures and collectives of marginalised and vulnerable groups/communities, for sustainable development results. Even though, HLF has not yet ventured much into climate adaptation projects, one of their future activities is focused on climate action. Additionally, the organisation is 100% on solar power to promote green energy.

Regarding the enabling environment in which marginalised and vulnerable primary actors feel equal actors the evidence shows that all stakeholders are represented on the project board.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of VIONET regarding duty of care is **24%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

Safety and security guidelines, protecting marginalised and vulnerable people within project scope have not been developed by VIONET so far. There are no risk assessment plans or mitigation plans. When these are required by a donor for funding purposes, drafts are availed. However, these are not adopted entirely by the organisation. Therefore, volunteers have also not been trained on the policies and guidelines as they do not exist.

VIONET does not have documented processes and procedures to address safety and security risks. At times verbal discussions are held with volunteers on existing and potential risks, however no security measures are in place to ensure volunteers safety. There are no risk assessments, mitigation, and contingency plans used in the volunteer pre placement training. Risk assessments are done only verbally. The report states, that this is not standard practice, and neither is it documented.

Still, volunteers provide written consent to their placement in the form of signed volunteer contracts and, communities are aware of the youth centres that have help desk staff available to address their concerns and risks.

The network does not have a safeguarding or child protection policy or guidelines in place. The need for technical assistance on this issue has been identified. The potential risk of volunteers being at harm or being harmful to others is overlooked by the assessed organisation. VIONET has flagged this

as requiring urgent attention as they work with many volunteers and many volunteer engaging organisations to ensure the safety of everyone.

VIONET's member organisations have not publicly displayed safeguarding materials at community level that marginalised and vulnerable people in the project can see and understand. No trainings have been done targeting these groups either. There are no clear or existing documented guides on whistle blowing processes, policies or guidelines. While no documented procedure exists, cases that are noted at the youth centres are reported to be treated with great urgency and are addressed, such as cases of sexual assault and abuse of power of other stakeholders.

VIONET's commitment to child protection includes measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse. They have also identified and partnered with a government department (Ministry of Social Welfare) and other entities (Poly clinics) that support them in addressing safeguarding concerns in the communities where they operate in.

Despite the collaborations with government and other local organisations in handling safeguarding concerns, the organisation displayed a number of shortcomings in its commitment to child protection. E.g., there are no clear or existent reporting mechanisms for abuse or safeguarding concerns. When entering into partnerships with other organisations or departments, no checks are done to ensure compliance with safeguarding and child protection policies.

VIONET has a Code of Conduct that sets standards of behaviour and obligations around safeguarding, prevention, mandatory reporting and response to sexual exploitation, abuse harassment, and gender-based violence and all staff and volunteers are exposed to these as part of Induction. Due to financial constraints regular trainings are not carried out as some volunteers may be placed far and funds are required to conduct trainings. Staff and volunteers do not sign off the Code of Conduct, however they do have access to it should they require refreshers.

Staff and volunteers are trained on their roles, responsibilities and procedures for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and gender-based violence. Training reports are compiled afterwards as evidence.

The overall performance of HLF regarding duty of care is **59%** and **requires some improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

HLF has developed Safety and security guidelines, related to protecting marginalised and vulnerable people within project scope. The organisation has a department dedicated towards ensuring the safety of both volunteers and marginalised primary actors. Volunteers are trained on these policies and guidelines during the induction/ orientation process. Processes and procedures to address security and risks are clearly defined and volunteers are made aware of the potential risks to themselves in the communities where they are volunteering.

Up-to-date risk assessments are done monthly. Risk assessments are shared via email to all staff and volunteers. HLF ensures that communities can report risk and that they can effectively respond.

Staff and volunteers are made aware of and inducted on organisations' safeguarding policies or guidelines to adhere to and report against any violation. HLF ensures that volunteers are provided with copies of safeguarding and child protection policies and guidelines.

HLF has publicly made available safeguarding policies or guidelines that anyone can access and understand. All staff and volunteers engaged by HLF have access to the safeguarding, child protection policy related documents. They sign the copies as acknowledgment of receipt and understanding of the contents of the policies.

HLF has publicly displayed safeguarding materials at community level that marginalised and vulnerable people in the project can see and understand. All safeguarding, child protection and whistle blowing procedures, incident reporting policies or guidelines are part of the on boarding and induction process for staff and volunteers.

Room for improvement has been identified regarding guidelines on not allowing volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential care facilities for children.

HLF has a recruitment policy that guides the recruitment and on boarding processes and clearly states the verification of identity documents.

HLF has a Code of Conduct that sets standards of behaviour and obligations around safeguarding, prevention, mandatory reporting and response to sexual exploitation, abuse harassment, and gender-based violence and all staff and volunteers are inducted on these. Staff and volunteers do not sign off the Code of Conduct, however they do have access to it. Staff and volunteers are trained on their roles, responsibilities, and procedures for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and gender-based violence. Training reports are compiled afterwards as evidence.

HLF does not have in place mitigation systems to reduce the potential impact of the placement on volunteers' health and wellbeing before, during and after the placement.

There are no pre-placement trainings, or mental health support in place.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of VIONET regarding measuring impact is **33%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

VIONET can measure the impact of their volunteering projects. They have established a planning framework and other mechanisms which are inclusive and responsive to local communities, other stakeholders, and the Sustainable Development Goals. However, the participation of stakeholders is minimal and subsequently their voice is not fully considered.

VIONET has not established and provided training to relevant project staff and volunteers on primary actor inclusive processes for data collection and routine monitoring of data as well as evaluations, as planned in a project. The reason being lack of expertise from existing staff and volunteers and lack of finances to engage an external consultant to do so.

VIONET considers the views and opinions of the community and relevant stakeholders. There is documented evidence of marginalised and vulnerable people's participation in monitoring, validation of project data/evidence of interventions. This is done through the collection of qualitative data and participatory research processes. VIONET has developed a project logical framework with inclusive indicators and a 7-step MERL plan. Monitoring and evaluation results are shared with community members and volunteers verbally.

Additionally, there is periodic feedback to the communities, shared verbally during interface meetings that bring various stakeholders and primary actors together.

The assessment showed that vulnerable primary actors are fully involved in the implementation process and that they contribute significantly to the decision-making process. The assessment shows clear best practice examples regarding this indicator. Within VIONET'S activities, primary actors are consulted during project design, and they are involved in the day-to-day routine monitoring of the project. They are engaged in establishing how the project's progress should be defined and measured. Varying stakeholders from ministries, civil society organisations define intended project outcomes together. Evidence is showcased in activity reports and monthly reports. A beneficiary feedback mechanism is used to gather information about the extent to which an intervention reaches

and benefits different groups. VIONET uses the After-Action Review tool, and this ensures that their interventions are more demand-led, people centred and inclusive.

Findings and recommendations of evaluations and monitoring are always shared with primary actors on various platforms and in various ways. Interface platforms such as WhatsApp and regular meetings are used to share feedback on the projects progress and challenges. The platform facilitates for decision making and strategic planning on changes that can be affected to improve effectiveness of the project.

The overall performance of HLF regarding measuring impact is **25%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

HLF conducts baseline studies and assesses community needs before designing any project. The process involves asking beneficiaries and stakeholders the kind of deliverables they expect and the problem and challenges they face.

HLF has, together with primary actors, developed a set of change indicators to measure progress throughout the project. However, the participation of stakeholders is minimal and subsequently their voice is not fully considered.

HLF has not provided training to relevant project staff and volunteers on primary actor inclusive processes for data collection and routine monitoring of data as well as evaluations, as planned in a project.

There is no documented evidence of marginalised and vulnerable people's participation in monitoring, validation of project data/evidence of interventions. There is no project logical framework with indicators (output, outcome, and impact), targets and assumption. There is no project monitoring, evaluation and learning plan (MEL) that has been developed. No staff and volunteers have been trained to fulfil their monitoring and evaluation roles in the project.

Project (progress/end) reports show where and how the project results are validated and modified/changed with feedback from marginalised and vulnerable people/communities.

Project evaluations are also designed and conducted to validate outputs and outcomes with marginalised and vulnerable primary actors/communities across geographic locations. HLF has a dedicated Monitoring and Evaluation department with dedicated personnel. This department is responsible for all project evaluations including of set outputs and outcomes with marginalised and vulnerable communities. The evidence is found in the M&E reports.

HLF does also provide feedback to the communities annually. Feedback is shared verbally during interface meetings that bring various stakeholders and primary actors together.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of VIONET's member organisations regarding managing volunteers is **32%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

VIONET has a transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment policy. The organisation has a documented recruitment policy which defines volunteering for the recruiting organisation, setting out relevant objectives, procedures, and responsibilities. The report shows that there is standardisation across all typologies. However, the framework for screening and scoring candidates only exists for staff positions and not volunteers.

Volunteer applications are not screened against role description, there is no pre-determined standard for selection for each role, and limited feedback on reasons of non-selection given to candidates. Job descriptions are not consistent despite the typology. According to VIONET, the job description is dictated by the project in which the volunteer is engaged in. Duties assigned may be project specific or cross cutting across all departments.

Remuneration is not consistent across community and national volunteers. While, national volunteers receive remunerations as monthly allowances, other volunteer stipends are guided by the other organisations in which they are engaged. The general standard however is transport and lunch allowance. This however is not always provided.

The recruitment policy clearly stipulates the processes in screening, short listing, scoring, and providing feedback. Background checks are not done as part of the verification process.

Volunteers receive relevant and adequate training pertaining to their placement. They are familiarised with all relevant policies and procedures, namely the Code of Conduct, relating to their placement. Volunteers are guided through their job descriptions and responsibilities during the orientation phase.

There are no developed work plans to track deliverables. Subsequently this makes it a difficult to track the progress made by volunteers in achieving their prescribed duties. It also means that reviews are not carried out. Performance review reports are intended to document these however there is no consistency in undertaking them on the volunteer management side.

There is no documented assessment or collective reflection of volunteer performance and impact by community members, volunteers, and project staff.

VIONET conducts post placement debriefs with volunteers, however there is no established formal process. Weekly debriefs sessions are conduced to address challenges, opportunities and anything happening within their areas of operation.

The overall performance of HLF regarding managing volunteers is **27%** and **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards**.

While HLF has a transparent, equitable, and fair recruitment policy for staff, they do not have such a policy for volunteers. HLF does not screen volunteer roles against role description; selection is not made against a standard set of criteria for each role.

HLF is not involved in professional volunteering. Volunteers in their work are youth volunteers who would have just finished High School or are still studying, and their roles are usually community-based group tasks. For their youth volunteers and community volunteers HLF conducts orientation sessions which include training on the organisational policies and guidelines.

Volunteers receive relevant and adequate training pertaining to their placement and volunteers' performance show a direct and clear value of induction, training, and accompaniment provided for the role to succeed. However, HLF does not have specific documented volunteer performance. Their work is measured as collective effort including partners, beneficiaries, and staff members. Volunteer debriefs post the tasks shows more of future aim for marginalised and vulnerable communities. However, given that these tasks can be of short periods not much personal development is realised.

Assessment summary for Zimbabwe:

VIONET:

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Designing and Planning	53%	Requires some improvement to meet recommended standard
2) Duty of Care	24%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standard
3) Measuring Impact	33%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standard
4) Managing Volunteers	32%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standard

The findings show that VIONET lacks significant expertise, policies, and financial and human capital resources. The network, which is made up of small and growing VIOs, does not have clear and effective governance structures or systems to lead effectively. Subsequently, this affects particularly the duty of care, measuring impact and volunteer management.

The report summarises: *"The volunteering component at VIONET is not designed to be satisfactory on both the ends of the VIO and the volunteer him/herself. The engagement is focused on the organisation achieving its set goal. It was observed that there are no career or personal development or incentivised benefits in most instances."*

Despite the room for improvement, the country researchers highlighted that VIONET is working with hard to reach and mostly neglected members of societies such as the LGBTQI community.

HLF:

Pillar	% Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Designing and Planning	87%	Most recommended requirements are met
2) Duty of Care	59%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	25%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	27%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards

The findings show, that HLF is more established and set with policies and practices as opposed to VIONET. Therefore, the organisation has more structures in place that help to address challenges. Safeguarding and child protection policies exist. Still, there is room for improvement particularly regarding the management of volunteers and measuring impact.

Cross-Country Observations

The country reports allow us to carve out themes and patterns that will inform capacity-building activities with partner organisations over the next twelve months:

- All assessed organisations and projects are particularly strong on the **"designing and planning"** pillar. Across the evaluated organisations and projects, the voice and inputs from the target community are represented in designing interventions and volunteer activities. All reports provided evidence that VSO-supported activities and interventions contribute to building structures and collectives of marginalised and vulnerable communities and, thereby, to sustainable development results. This result clearly shows the success of VSO's efforts in recent years to strengthen the role and voice of primary actors across its programmes.

- While most organisations are committed to promoting **a better environment, climate adaptation, and safeguarding marginalised and vulnerable groups**, several organisations within the four countries reported difficulties meeting the indicator due to the lack of resources.

- The results of the **"duty of care" pillar** vary considerably between organisations. While some more established organisations reached very high scores, others still need to work on a range of issues regarding the indicators of that pillar. The findings suggest that the lack of expertise and resources (human, time, financial) are a common challenge and leads to the weakness in providing or developing adequate **risk mitigation systems, child protection, safeguarding policies, guidelines, and materials,** as well as assuring their implementation on all levels of the programmes, activities, and volunteer involvement.

- Regarding measuring impact, the findings suggest overall good performance across the countries except for the two assessed organisations in Zimbabwe. While they are the only two with relatively low scores and will have to work on this part of the Index comprehensively, several other organisations share the challenge to ensure the participation of "marginalised and vulnerable people in monitoring, validation of project data/evidence of interventions" and to "clearly assess and measure volunteers' collective contributions to change lives". These findings resonate with VSO's 2021 learning study, which reported difficulties of VSO country teams with measuring the contribution of volunteers, especially those of community volunteers, compared to national or international volunteers.

- Most organisations face only minor challenges in meeting the requirements of the **"managing volunteers" pillar.** This might be due to the nature of the selected organisations and their involvement with VSO and/or VfD. Still, it is worth looking at those challenges to see where VSO can still provide more support in meeting all the requirements of that section of the Index. Issues observed among various organisations include:
  - Advertising roles as transparently and openly as possible.
  - Providing clear job descriptions – especially in the case of community volunteers.
  - Packaging organisational policies in an easily understandable format ready for distribution to volunteers – especially in cases where many policy documents and guidelines do not exist yet.
  - Ensuring volunteers' performance show a direct and clear value of induction, training, and accompaniment provided for the role to succeed.
  - Planning performance review sessions for each volunteer placement – especially the question of involving community members or primary actors.

Several findings hint to the different natures and structures of the assessed organisations and projects. VMC in Cambodia is a government related programme, not led directly by VSO, in which volunteering is just one component of a larger endeavour. This might be why their scores are lower in sections such as including community members in planning and evaluation but also duty of care.

VIONET Zimbabwe as a member network plays a minor role in planning and design. Made up of small VIOs, VIONET lacks significant expertise, policies and financial and human capital resources that explain their relatively low scores across the elements of the index. COPA is run entirely by volunteers and might therefore lack formalised structures and instruments of safeguarding as the focus might be rather on the actual development work than on institution and capacity building. However, these are only possible assumptions since the index does not survey the reasons for the absence of evidence and thus for a lower score and performance.

Pillar	CAM	MAL	NEP	ZIM-VIO	ZIM-HLF
1) Designing and Planning	73%	67%	67%	53%	87%
2) Duty of Care	37%	26%	78%	24%	59%
3) Measuring Impact	50%	83%	79%	33%	25%
4) Managing Volunteers	77%	55%	91%	32%	27%

Conclusions

One of the report's main aims was to build evidence and insight about implementing the R&I Index to inform and guide future actions of VSO and projects. The country analysis as well as the cross-country observations, have carved out clear points for such actions, with a primary focus on duty of care and measuring impact. The report also includes a variety of best practice examples that can be used to inform other VSO country teams or partner organisations about possible solutions and approaches to face challenges in meeting all the requirements of the Index.

VSO was also keen to see if the R&I Index, as a contextualisation of the Global Standard, can be implemented at the project level and may be more helpful for applying a minimum standard for Responsible & Impactful Volunteering. While the answer to this question is mainly yes, there remain a couple of difficulties regarding the Index and its application with smaller Global South VIOs:

- Even though the Index reduced the complexity of the Global Standard, some parts are still less applicable or relevant in some settings, based on the design, context and type of volunteer project in which the Index is being adopted. For example, the research assistants from Zimbabwe reported they felt that the tool still focused more on national volunteers and less on community volunteers. A few elements of the assessment questions do not apply to community volunteers, such as questions about living costs in case they continue living at home or questions about their preparation to serve in another context.
- Some of the metrics will remain aspirational for smaller Global South VIOs. For example, the requirement to include climate adaptation approaches into all activities. The report hints to the dilemma between what might be essential or desirable and what is possible for certain organisations and projects.
- Stipends or remuneration are other examples. For smaller organisations and within the context of community volunteers, those are not applicable the same way they are for national volunteers. Hence, contrary to its claim, the Index, similarly to the Global Standard, is still not universally applicable to all VIO realities in the Global South.
- Collective performance review sessions for each volunteer placement involving community members/primary actors are, for some organisations, almost impossible to implement. For example, Cambodia reported that most VMCs activities are volunteer group activities. Given the number of volunteers serving nationwide, this would need a lot of capacity and tie up many resources.
- The report from Cambodia detected possible discrepancies between community members' interests and the values of the R&I index, e.g., if the community prefers an educational project over climate protection. The same report offered a possible solution to the dilemma: For example, the community need was more focused on agriculture. Hence a hydroponic agriculture was introduced with the aim to improve agricultural outcomes and at the same time to reduce chemical and dangerous components. This points to the importance of community engagement in planning and design.
- Some of the research assistants had difficulties getting the correct information and evidence for a couple of indicators of the Index. If this is the case for external evaluators, smaller organisations with limited resources are more likely to struggle to go through an assessment process and develop and implement the necessary policies and practices. The VSO 2021

learning study produced a similar result. The R&I index has already made progress by reducing the Global Standard. Still, the level of complexity of such indices and their relevance and applicability for smaller Global South VIOs remains an issue to work on in future.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen VSO's engagement with the Global Standard and integrate the R&I index further into VSO programmes and projects, the following recommendations have been identified. On the one hand, these recommendations refer to the results of the first assessment using the R&I Index, on the other hand they refer to the further development of the index itself and its implementation within VSO and the wider VfD sector:

1. VSO should share its resources related to Duty of Care with organisations still struggling to meet all index requirements. As this pillar of the index includes particularly sensitive aspects for volunteering activities and given the importance of all duty of care related issues, VSO should support all partner organisations in achieving the standards.

2. Support and share good practice of concepts, approaches and tools for assuring participation of marginalised and vulnerable people in monitoring, validation of project data/evidence among partner countries and projects.

3. Support and share good practice of concepts, approaches and tools to assess and measure volunteers' collective contributions to change lives.

4. Identify reasons for lower scores and the relationship with the kind and nature of the organisation to provide adequate support to achieve improvements to meet the required standards of the index.

5. Create different benchmarks for different kinds of organisations. In order to not discourage smaller VIOs, there is a need for finding a middle ground between what is desirable and what is possible. Creating different benchmarks for different kinds of organisations and to develop criteria in order to differentiate them can be a solution.

6. Further develop the R&I index and the scalar table and customise them further to address the diversity of projects and organisations included in the study sample.

7. Revise and further develop the process for the next round of assessment of the R&I Index. Improve training of country researchers to ensure that the right organisational level of projects is addressed, and that VSO's activities are not conflated with those of partner organisations.

8. Share the experience and lessons learnt from the RI& index administration with FORUM and the wider VfD sector to further contribute to the global effort to mainstream the Global Standard and assure its applicability and relevance for smaller Global South VIOs.

Appendix

Pillar 1: Planning and Designing

Project scale and outcomes are designed with participation, voice and inputs from the target community.

Are primary actors (community members) involved in design of projects?

Were learning and evidence documents (e.g., situational analysis, stakeholder assessments, evaluation reports, best practice documents) used to inform project design

Project supports activities/interventions that build structures and collectives of marginalised and vulnerable groups/communities, for sustainable development results.

Were primary actors/community volunteers involved in planning the project/programme?

Does project design/implementation include plans to equip primary actors/volunteers to engage with relevant authorities/duty bearers

Is there an enabling environment (opportunity for primary actors , volunteers to use their voice and agency)and policies in support of project sustainability

Have relevant stakeholders committed to ensuring progress in this area? How is this commitment demonstrated e.g., dedicated funding,

Project interventions protect and promote better environment, climate adaptation, and safeguarding of marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Does organisation measure carbon footprint resulting for project related travel ?

What nature based/eco-friendly solutions have been adopted ?

Project demonstrates an enabling environment in which volunteers feel equal actors alongside staff and partners, in implementation decisions within their respective remit.

Are all project team members aware of intended outcomes?

Are all project team members aware of their particular contribution to project outcomes?

Are project teams able to determine how best to conduct their work ?

Project demonstrates an enabling environment in which marginalised and vulnerable primary actors feel equal actors alongside VSO and partners, in the implementation process decision making.

Were primary actors consulted during project design?

Were primary actors involved in day to day routine monitoring of project implementation?

Were primary actors involved in periodic review of project progress?

Were primary actors involved in evaluations to ascertain project outcomes ?

Project evaluations are designed and conducted to validate outputs and outcomes with marginalised and vulnerable primary actors/communities across geographic locations.

Is it standard practice to plan for outcome evaluations at the project conception stage?

How are evaluation findings and recommendations shared with primary actors and partners?

What is the process of monitoring implementation of evaluation recommendations?

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

Safety and Security guidelines, protecting marginalised and vulnerable people within project scope, have been developed by VSO and/or partner organisations.

Does the organisation have documented Safety and Security policies or guidelines?

Have Volunteers been trained on the policies and guidelines ?

Does the organisation have processes and procedures to address safety and security risks?

Are volunteers made aware of potential risks to community members and to themselves?

Up-to-date risk assessments, mitigation, and contingency plans are used in the volunteer pre placement training and volunteers consent to placement taken.

How often are risk assessments done ?

In what format are risk assessment results shared with volunteers?

Do volunteers provide written consent to placement?

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Are communities aware of how they can report new /emerging risks ?

Staff and volunteers are made aware of and inducted on organisations' safeguarding policies or guidelines to adhere to and report against any violation.
VSO and partners have publicly made available safeguarding policies or guidelines that anyone can access and understand.
VSO and partners have publicly displayed safeguarding materials at community level that marginalised and vulnerable people in the project can see and understand.

Does the organisation , partner where volunteer will be placed have documented safeguarding and child protection policies or guidelines.

Do staff and volunteers have access to the safeguarding, child protection policy related documents.
Are safeguarding, child protection and whistleblowing procedures, incident reporting policies or guidelines included as part of the onboarding and induction process for staff and volunteers?
Have staff and volunteers been trained on safeguarding, child protection and whistleblowing processes, policies or guidelines.
How often does the training take place?

Has it been clearly communicated how to raise a safeguarding concern and what are the channels?

Organisations' commitment to child protection includes measures and structures designed to prevent and respond to abuse.

Are there measures and procedures in place to prevent and respond to abuse?

Are there clear reporting mechanisms for instances of abuse or safeguarding concerns?

Have roles been defined in the organisation that have responsibility for responding to abuse?

Does the organisation have resources (including human and financial resources) available for implementing the safeguarding work.

Have local organisations/govt agencies been identified that can support in responding to safeguarding cases?

Does the organisation carry out any project or event specific safeguarding risk assessments?

Does the organisation run a safeguarding due diligence check or partnership assessment before proceeding partnership with other organisations?

Does the organisation have arrangements for mandatory safeguarding/child protection training for its staff and volunteers?

Organisations do not allow volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential care facilities for children;

Does the organisation have clear principles around not allowing volunteers to work with or within orphanages or other residential care facilities for children to prevent risks of harm and negative effects to children?

Safe recruitment, professional reference and criminal background checks are conducted for all staff and volunteers.

Are background and reference checks done for staff and volunteers ?

Do they include from last line manager?

Are the references verified?

Does the organisation have clear recruitment/policy guidance on checks?

Are questions asked at interview stage regarding safeguarding to check understanding?

Do they include Safeguarding Strapline during job advertisements?

Does relevant role (like People lead, Safeguarding Officer, Project Manager, Leadership positions etc) has specific safeguarding specific roles and responsibilities mentioned in role profiles?

Does the organisation check the identification document like National ID, Passport, etc. of staff and volunteer as part of recruitment process?

There is a code of conduct speaking to staff and volunteers expected behaviours and obligations around safeguarding, prevention, mandatory reporting and response to sexual exploitation, abuse, harassment, and gender-based violence and that all staff and volunteers are inducted and regularly trained on them.

Does the organisation have a code of conduct or set of rules that sets standards and expectations of employees and volunteers in terms of professional ethics, integrity and safeguarding, including obligations around prevention, reporting and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and gender-based violence.

Do the staff and volunteer sign off the Code of conduct?

Are all staff and volunteers trained on their roles, responsibilities and procedures for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, and gender-based violence.

Organisations have in place mitigation systems to reduce the potential impact of the placement on volunteers' health and wellbeing before, during and after the placement

Does the organisation have mitigation systems in place to reduce the potential impact of the placement on volunteers' health and wellbeing before, during and after the placement?

What type of support is available for community volunteers (if have any attached to organisation) ?

What duty of care services are included for instance security, psychosocial, emotional?

Does pre-placement training include common stresses and how to deal with them?

Does pre-placement training include mental health including how to seek support ?

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

VSO/partners have together with primary actors developed a set of change indicators to measure progress throughout the project.

Has the organisation established baselines against which project results will be measured ?

Has the organisation established output, outcome and if possible, impact measures against which progress in the project will be measured?

Have systems been established to enable community members and stakeholders take part in collection of monitoring data?

VSO/partners have established and provided training to relevant project staff and volunteers on primary actor inclusive processes for data collection and routine monitoring of data as well as evaluations, as planned in a project.

Have staff, volunteers, community members and relevant stakeholders been provided with training on participatory project monitoring processes ?

Documented evidence of marginalised and vulnerable people's participation in monitoring, validation of project data/evidence of interventions.

Has a project logical framework with indicators (output, outcome and impact), targets and assumption been developed ?

Has a project monitoring, evaluation and learning plan (MEL)been developed ? to include data management tools, planned evaluation and learning exercises, resourcing

Have all staff and volunteers been trained to fulfil their monitoring and evaluation roles in the project?

Project evaluations/case studies/ community feedback, clearly assess and measure volunteers' collective contributions to change in lives of marginalised and vulnerable people (outputs and outcomes achievement.

Are community members included in routine project monitoring?

Are volunteers included in routine monitoring?

Are project results (positive and negative) documented and shared with all stakeholders?

Project (progress/end) reports show where and how the project results are validated and modified/changed with feedback from marginalised and vulnerable people/communities.

How often are results updates provided to communities?

If yes, what format are these in?
How often are results updates provided to stakeholders?

If yes, what format are these in?
How often are results updates provided to partners?

If yes, what format are these in?

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

VSO & Partners has a transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment policy.

Does the organisation have documented volunteer recruitment policies?

VSO & Partners has a transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment process.

Does the organisation have documented processes/guidelines for volunteer recruitment process?

Are these standardised across typologies?

Is there a clear framework for screening and scoring candidates?

All volunteer applications are screened against role description, selection is made against a standard set of criteria for each role, and all candidates communicated clearly reasons of non-selection.

Is there a clear job description for the role?

Is this job description consistent irrespective of the typology?
Are stipends/remuneration consistent across national and community volunteers?

Has role been advertised on available platforms? e.g., community notice boards, local media, online

Is there documented evidence of the process followed to screen, shortlist , score and provide feedback candidates?

Are background checks done as part of the selection process?

All relevant organisational policies/guidelines are provided to volunteers as part of their onboarding/orientation process

Are organisational policies packaged in an easily understandable format ready for distribution to volunteers

Partners are oriented on volunteer management with documented agreement on expectations along with relevant guidelines shared.	Have responsibilities of the organisation to the volunteer been documented and shared with the candidate ?
Volunteers receive relevant and adequate training pertaining to their placement.	Are volunteers walked through their job descriptions? Are volunteers made aware of social, cultural norms and expectations of the area they will be placed? Are volunteers made aware of financial costs of the area they will be placed and support available from the organisation?
Volunteers' performance shows a direct and clear value of induction, training, and accompaniment provided for the role to succeed.	Has a work plan with timeframes and deliverables been developed? Has frequency of performance reviews been agreed to between the volunteer and the entity? Have volunteer performance reviews been conducted?
Volunteer performance and impact is assessed with documented, periodic, collective reflections by community members, volunteers, and project staff.	Have collective performance review sessions been planned for each volunteer placement i.e., involving community members/primary actors? Have the collective performance review sessions been conducted for each volunteer placement?

Volunteer debriefs post placement show volunteer's own personal development and their future aim for marginalised and vulnerable communities.

Is there an established process for volunteer debriefs ?

Are all volunteers taken through debrief process ?

How does organisation utilise information from debriefs?

How long did it take to address any grievances raised by volunteers (indicate number of months)?