

Independent Progress Review of DFID's SGA with VSO



Final report 26th October 2012
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The SGA's IPR for VSO

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Acronyms and abbreviations

AVI	Australian Volunteers International
CD	Country Director
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
Cuso	Originally 'Canadian University Service Overseas,' now just Cuso
FGD	Focus group discussion
GDI	Gender-related Development Index
GLT	Global Leadership Team
HDI	Human Development Index
HROD	Human Resources and Organisational Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LDC	Least Development Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPA	Non-Profit Association (which is what a CSO is called in Laos)
OCV	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PAP	Programme Area Plan
PLWHA	People Living with HIV/Aids
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PPA	Programme Partnership Arrangement
SGA	Strategic Grant Agreement
SNV	Originally 'Stichting Nederlandse Vrijwilligers' (Foundation of Netherlands Volunteers), now 'Netherlands Development Organisation'
SME	Small and medium size enterprises
UXO	Unexploded ordinance, mortar or artillery shells or cluster bombs
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

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Executive summary

VSO is an international development agency, and the UK's largest one that is based on volunteering. The organisation matches professional volunteers with national and local partner organisations in order to build these organisations' capacity to improve the quality of and access to basic services, and to advocate for change that benefits poor people.

This Independent Progress Review (IPR) assesses the work of VSO in the context of the organisation's Strategic Grant Agreement (SGA). The IPR's purpose is threefold:

1. To assess the extent to which VSO has acted upon the comments provided by DFID as part of the Annual Review Process.
2. To verify, and supplement where necessary, VSO's SGA-related reporting (i.e. the Annual Review, case studies and additionality report).
3. To independently evaluate the impact that DFID funding has had on VSO, its partners and its ultimate beneficiaries, and to assess this funding's value for money.

This IPR concludes that there is significant scope for strengthening VSO's performance, and for assessing, documenting and learning from its successes and challenges. These are not new conclusions and VSO has already initiated an ambitious change process that is likely to result in progress in a range of fields.

This IPR's primary points of reference are the SGA logframe, business case, Annual Review reports, and VSO's value chain. Its methods were largely taken from Coffey's Evaluation Strategy, and include documentation reviews, interviews, focus group discussions, number trailing and swim lanes.

First part of the IPR: to assess the extent to which VSO has acted upon the comments provided by DFID as part of the Annual Review Process

DFID acknowledged several strengths in VSO's reporting, and provided actionable comments in four areas:

1. *The logframe is insufficiently strong.* VSO acknowledged this and has produced a new version. This new version does not (and cannot) address the logframe's main weakness, which is related to the variable quality of the baseline data underpinning the logframe, and of the milestone data collected in subsequent years.
2. *The annual review is insufficiently focused.* VSO's short term solution is an independent assessment in the form of this IPR, and its long term promise is to improve the quality of its reporting. To be able to deliver on this promise, VSO requires a stronger monitoring and evaluation system. Strengthening this system is part of VSO's change process plans.
3. *The reporting on learning is limited and VSO's involvement in the Learning Partnership is disappointing.* VSO has already taken action to intensify its involvement in the Learning Partnership. We note that neither VSO's reporting nor DFID's feedback do justice to:
 - VSO's multiple learning systems, learning strategy, and the intensive learning that accompanies the change programmes that VSO is currently implementing; and
 - The core of VSO's work with its partners, which is centred about learning and capacity building.
4. *The case studies are not comparable in nature and lack depth.* VSO promised to share additional case studies and is planning to submit them in March 2013. The IPR has reviewed a range of VSO case studies and found that, with only a little additional research, several of them could potentially provide the depth and comparability that DFID requested.

Second part of the IPR: to verify, and supplement where necessary, VSO's SGA-related reporting (i.e. the Annual Review, case studies and additionality report)

VSO's additionality report rightly points out that the SGA grant is a continuation of a long history of unrestricted DFID support, and that the organisation would not have survived a sudden break with this tradition. The bottom line is that this three-year £78 million SGA grant is not about additionality but about VSO's survival.

Two other and unreported bottom lines are that:

- In the first half of the SGA three-year period, the SGA grant amounted to more than half the organisation's overall funding. The grant has been utilised to cover a wide range of expenses, and this makes it impossible to separate the SGA impact from VSO's *overall* impact.
- The SGA disbursements decrease year-on-year, from £30 to £26 to £22 million. This has caused VSO to bolster its fundraising capacity, and early indications suggest that VSO may successfully move from an organisation that is predominantly DFID-funded to an organisation with a balanced and diverse funding portfolio.

The historic availability of unrestricted DFID funding may help to explain why VSO has not developed sufficiently robust and rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems. This scarcity of high-quality evaluations causes a lack of verified insight in the impact of the organisation, and this helps to explain why the Annual Review and case studies lack focus and rigour.

Third part of the IPR: to independently evaluate the impact that DFID funding has had on VSO, its partners and its ultimate beneficiaries, and to assess this funding's value for money

In the course of six country assessments, the IPR consultants came across three types of impact.

1. Deep and long-lasting impact on poor and disadvantaged communities. These successes could be utilised for learning and promotional purposes. This requires more thorough assessments.
2. Short term and some longer term impact. The extent of the success largely depends on the partnership assessment and design, and on the extent to which the volunteer's role is embedded in the organisation.
3. Minor, negligible or no measureable impact. This happens when VSO is unable to identify an appropriate volunteer, when a partner proves unable to adequately utilise a volunteer, or when a volunteer leaves earlier than expected and before having made an impact.

VSO does not have sufficient insight in the prevalence and reasons behind these three types of impact. Based on limited evidence, this IPR tentatively came to the following three conclusions:

1. **VSO's Value Chain is a powerful framework, and a programme's impact largely depends on its adherence to this chain.** The chain consists of eight steps:
 1. Identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies.
 2. Identification of key partners in line with the regional and country strategies.
 3. Development of individual partnership plans.
 4. Recruitment and preparation of suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans.
 5. Volunteers' work with partners.

This leads to:

6. Sustainably strengthened partner organisations.
7. Sustainably strengthened partner performance.
8. Improvements in the lives of poor and marginalised people.

Currently and on average, the chain's first and fourth steps are strongest, and its second and third steps are weakest.

2. **VSO's success largely depends on its partners' incentives to change.** VSO chooses to concentrate on the world's poorest countries and weakest states. With this choice, VSO takes a calculated but substantial risk, as this means that VSO will often work in extremely challenging environments. In such environments, it is helpful to systematically map out the various overt and hidden change-related incentives and disincentives of partners in general and VSO's counterparts in particular.
3. **VSO is ideally suited for innovative work,** as VSO's primary assets are its volunteers' expertise and ability to import international good practice. It is easy to find initiatives where VSO volunteers have introduced new and useful processes, systems and ways of working in the fields of education, health, HIV/Aids, livelihoods and national volunteering. Because innovation is risky, the organisation requires a tolerance to failure and a focus on the success of the sum total of the organisation's innovative work, rather than the results of its individual initiatives.

This IPR makes a number of recommendations. The most important ones are as follows:

VSO would benefit from a much more thorough and consistent approach to M&E, and from introducing post-closure impact evaluations. In the next few years, VSO will not be able to evaluate all of its programmes. When planning M&E activities, it may be wise to prioritise:

1. M&E activities that would support the development of a more meaningful organisational logframe.
2. VSO's most impressive successes. These successes could be used to learn from and for the purpose of strengthening VSO's policy contributions and marketing material.

Country offices could benefit more from VSO's International's tools and guidance. The chances of partnership success, and the extent of such success, would increase if country offices more consistently adhered to VSO guidance on the identification of partners and the management of partnerships. The introduction of multi-year partner-specific learning logs could help to ensure that the quality of partnerships progresses over time.

Means should not overshadow ends. The deployment of volunteers is not always the most appropriate and cost-effective type of support for VSO's partners. VSO has other means in stock and would benefit from more systematically exploring them. Considering that volunteering is and will remain VSO's core business, the best possible support sometimes requires the involvement of other support organisations. Such possibilities could be explored more systematically in cases where a partner might not be best served through volunteering.

VSO's performance in the fields of economy, effectiveness and efficiency is inconsistent, and not systematically monitored and documented. VSO's change programme is strengthening each of these three areas, and the SGA final review is likely to find significant improvements in the organisation's Value for Money performance, and in its capacity to *demonstrate* this strengthened performance.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the evaluation

As per the Coffey Evaluation Strategy (Appendix 8.1, page 1), the purpose of the IPR is threefold:

4. To assess the extent to which VSO has acted upon the comments provided by DFID as part of the Annual Review Process;
5. To verify, and supplement where necessary, VSO's SGA-related reporting (i.e. the Annual Review, case studies and additionality report); and
6. To independently evaluate the impact that DFID funding has had on VSO, its partners and its ultimate beneficiaries, and to assess this funding's value for money.

1.2 Scope of the evaluation

To do justice to the diverse ways in which the SGA funding has been utilised (see section 1.6) we have assessed the organisation's *overall* capacity – and changes therein - to consistently and verifiably reach relevant results efficiently and effectively.

1.3 Focus of the evaluation

This evaluation's primary points of reference are the SGA logframe, business case, Annual Review reports, and VSO's value chain.¹ In line with the SGA and overall VSO expenditure, we focused most of our attention on programme implementation and support services.

1.4 Organisational context

VSO is an international development agency, and the largest UK one that works through volunteering. The organisation was established in 1958 and has grown into an International Federation that has deployed tens of thousands of volunteers, from 94 nationalities, to VSO's partners in 90 developing countries.

VSOs approach to development is to partner skilled professional volunteers with national and local partner organisations in order to build these organisations' capacity to improve the quality of and access to basic services, and to advocate for change that benefits poor people.

In order to deliver the best possible response to local development contexts, VSO works with both international and national volunteers, and has developed volunteer models that utilise diaspora communities, Parliamentarians, and private sector's SCR-related contributions. In addition, VSO is increasingly working with young people, in recognition of the importance of their role in achieving youth-focused development.

VSO has developed a 'theory of change' to demonstrate its distinctive contribution to development. This theory of change addresses four levels of intervention that contribute to development:

1. Improved quality and access to basic services;
2. Individuals are better able to participate and contribute to decision making;
3. Civil society is better able to hold governments to account, resulting in better development and implementation of pro-poor policies; and
4. Communities are better able to help themselves through active citizen participation through national volunteering.

¹ We and the VSO IPR Steering Committee agreed that VSO's Value Chain was a more useful reference point than VSO's Theory of Change.

VSO makes its contributions through a people-centred development approach that is dedicated to building capacity within organisations and their communities through the successful transfer of skills, knowledge and experience.

1.5 Logic and assumptions supporting DFID SGA-funded project and/or programme activities

The SGA grant has not been utilised to fund a specific set of project or programme activities. Instead and as the table in section 1.6 shows, VSO utilised this funding – which amounts to over half VSO’s total funding - to cover a very wide range of costs related to volunteers and programmes, support services, fundraising, communication, policy and advocacy work, the implementation of VSO’s change programme, and the work of VSO’s members (e.g. VSO Netherlands, Ireland, Philippines). In addition, part of the grant has been added to VSO’s general reserves.

The implication is that the SGA-related logic is identical to the overall organisational logic, which revolves around a Value Chain that, if carefully followed, ensures that the strategic deployment of expert volunteers helps to improve the lives of poor and marginalised people. This Value Chain consists of eight steps:

1. Identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies.
2. Identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies.
3. Development of individual partnership plans.
4. VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans.
5. Volunteers work with partners in country.
6. Partner organisations are strengthened sustainably.
7. As a result: strengthened partner organisations.
8. Poor and marginalised people have improved lives.

1.6 Overview of SGA funded activities

From the PPA IPR Guidance Notes

A summary of the type and scale of activities funded through PPA funding and the relative amount of funding that has been disbursed during the evaluation period.

DFID’s SGA to VSO amounts to £78m over three years. Annual allocations decrease over time, from £30m to £26m to £22m. In 2011-2012, it was spent as follows:²

	Allocation in £000	Percentage of SGA total
Programmes	11,765	39%
Support services	5,750	19%
Grants to VSO federation members³	3,801	13%

² Note that SGA funding is 84.5% of VSO’s overall unrestricted income, and is not tagged separately in VSO’s financial administration. The figures in this table assume that SGA was spent in the same proportion as VSO’s overall unrestricted income.

	Allocation in £000	Percentage of SGA total
Fundraising	2,493	8%
Communications, marketing and engagement	2,236	7%
Surplus to reserves	1,465	5%
Volunteering	1,174	4%
Policy	909	3%
Change programmes (excluding fundraising)	407	1%
Total	30,000	100

1.7 Relationship of DFID SGA funded activities to other programme activities

From the PPA IPR Guidance Notes

Summary of the distinction (if any) of PPA funded activities from other activities carried out by the organisation in terms of type and scale of activities.

In two ways, SGA funding made other programme activities possible:

1. Without SGA funding, VSO would have had to downscale very substantially in order to survive. More than 50% of VSO's current total funding is SGA funding and this is a continuation of the previous PPA period, which provided VSO with £89 million over three years (with the major difference being that the current SGA provides funding that decreases by £4m per year – from £30m to £26m to £22m).
2. We have seen several examples of VSO utilising SGA funding to leverage further funding (e.g. proposals that attracted funding from AusAid in Papua New Guinea (PNG) were written by a member of staff 'on SGA time').

2 Evaluation methodology

2.1 Evaluation plan

2.1.1 Evaluation questions

The four key evaluation questions have been:

1. To what extent has VSO acted upon the comments provided by DFID?
2. To what extent has VSO's SGA-related reporting been correct and comprehensive?
3. What has been the impact that VSO has had on its partners and its ultimate beneficiaries?
4. What has been the value for money of VSO operations in general and of VSO's SGA funding in particular?

³ VSO members are legally independent parts of the VSO family. Most members have a fundraising and a volunteer recruitment function. VSO members are distinct from VSO country offices, which may or may not be legally independent and which implement VSO programmes.

2.1.2 Evaluation design (and rationale for design)

Formal requirements

To fulfil the IPR's formal requirements, the evaluation was conducted:

- On the basis of the SGA logframe and business case; and
- To the extent possible, within the framework provided by Coffey's Evaluation Strategy.
- In the spirit of the [OECD DAC Quality Standards for Development Evaluation](#) and, whenever we engaged with children, compliant with [UNICEF's child-focused ethical evaluation guidelines](#).

Units of analysis

The units of analysis follow the logframe, which means that the starting points were the individual beneficiaries and the partners that VSO worked with. To assess if a single beneficiary is included in the aggregate beneficiary numbers once and only once, we followed reporting trails from randomly selected individuals to the worldwide SGA report.

Using an organic rice cultivation project in Laos as an example, this verification process consisted of the following steps:⁴

Select a project site.

In the course of a telephone conversation with the Country Representative of Cuso-VSO Lao, we agreed to visit Nongdeng. Once there, we asked for a list of project sites, and visited one of them.

Check if the number of people who benefited from this rice cultivation project is in line with the volunteer's list of the project's beneficiaries.

In interviews, we asked questions about the nature and benefits of the project, asked to see the rice fields and the manure, and confirmed the number of families that are part of the project and the number of people within each of the families.

Confirm that the number of this specific volunteer's local list appears, and appears only once, on the country-wide list of Cuso-VSO beneficiaries.

Back in the country office, we verified that the number of beneficiaries of this project is part of, and is counted only once in, the country office's overall report.

Confirm that the numbers of the national list appear, and appear only once, on the VSO's worldwide list.

In the document titled *VSO Global Data - DFID report May 2012* we checked if the local and national numbers of beneficiaries in Laos is identical to the numbers reported in the Cuso-VSO Lao office.

Confirm that VSO's PPA reporting is consistent with the organisation's worldwide list.

We compared the data reported in the document titled *VSO Global Data - DFID report May 2012* with the Annual Review.

Country selection: purposeful sampling

With information and advice from the VSO London office we have selected three countries in which VSO has progressed quickly with the adoption of VSO's change approach and priorities, and three countries in which VSO has not. Other considerations have been the country offices' budget-per-volunteer, the possibility to visit partners and regions that have graduated out of VSO programmes and the proximity to each other (to limit travelling time). Together, the countries had to work in the

⁴ We give another example of this process in the text box titled "Verifying impact" of section 3.1.2.

key sectors of Health, HIV/Aids, Education, Livelihoods and Disability. This led to the selection of the following countries:

1. **Cambodia**, as a random choice from among the countries that did not serve as a pilot country.
2. **Ghana**, because it was a 'new approach' pilot country and because of its size of operations and its work in livelihoods, health and education.
3. **Laos**, as the Cuso-VSO country office does a lot of work related to livelihoods, which is an area that VSO has asked us to assess. Laos is also the country where the budget-per-volunteer is lower than in any other country (£12.6k per volunteer), which is of interest in the light of DFID's desire to see VSO reducing its overhead costs.
4. **Namibia**, also a pilot country and a country where the programme will be closing in the near future. It is also one of the Southern African countries with an HIV programme – which is run as a regional programme from the South Africa-based RAISA office.
5. **Papua New Guinea** because it did not serve as a pilot country, has the largest budget-per-volunteer of all VSO country offices, and focuses on health (including HIV/Aids) and education.
6. **Tanzania**, because it was a 'new approach' pilot country and VSO has closed its operations in some regions, which allows us to verify the sustainability of the partners' strengthened capacity.

Partner selection: initial blind pencil tip sampling, followed by biased cluster sampling

For the three African countries' assessments, we selected partners randomly (blind pencil tip method), restricted only by travel constraints. At the end of the Africa visits, we realised that this selection had provided us with relatively few genuine success stories, and that travelling time had been excessive. To ensure that we would be able to review VSO's best work, and as much of it as possible, we dropped the principle of random selection when visiting the three Asian countries and instead walked through the list of partners with our country-based counterparts, ensuring that we visited at least a few long-standing and impactful partners (biased sampling), and then cluster other visits around these (cluster sampling – for example: visit the University of Goroka and taking the opportunity to visit next door's partner 'Calan').

Beneficiary sampling: disproportionate stratified multistage sampling

- **Multistage sampling.** For examples: Partner X works with Y schools; we would first sample from Y (blind pencil tip method, but only with schools that were located at no more than reasonable distance) and then visit the school and sample once more when *in* the school (and focus on a single stage or class, for example).
- **Stratified sampling** because it is important to get representatives from different groups, such as disabled and able-bodied pupils.
- **Disproportionate sampling** because DFID is interested in the extent to which programmes reach particularly disadvantaged groups. We focused more on girls than on boys, on people with disabilities wherever they benefited or could potentially have benefited from VSO contributions, and on ethnic minorities whenever ethnic minorities were particularly disadvantaged.

Finances: multistage data interpretation

VSO recently changed its financial system and is in the midst of a restructuring. In addition, the Annual Review documentation was prepared before having finalised the previous year's financial reports. The implication is that the expenditures of different years are not easily comparable, and that the various excel sheets and the Annual Review report were not mutually consistent. We gained insight in VSO's savings with the kind support of Alex Grimaldi and Jennifer Price, of VSO's finance function, by walking through the various excel sheets in the course of a number of phone calls, until a verifiably accurate picture emerged.

2.1.3 Research methodology and data collection strategy

Guidance from Coffey's Evaluation Strategy

For the sake of comparability across PPA/SGA evaluations, we employed the methods suggested in Coffey's Evaluation Strategy wherever this was possible. This means that:

- We reviewed each of the documents listed in Coffey's Annex 8.1, section 7.1. Annex F provides a full list of data and documents reviewed in the course of this assignment.
- We conducted formal interviews, facilitated workshops and focus group discussions, and had informal conversations with all stakeholders listed in Coffey's Annex 8.1, section 7.2. Annex D provides a full list of people consulted.
- We considered conducting one or more cost-benefit analyses (as we have done in another IPR) but, largely because VSO works through partners and its impact is therefore indirect and difficult to attribute, we were unable to find a programme where such an analysis would be possible without 'heroic assumptions.' As a compromise, we prepared an inventory of peer-reviewed publications that report on cost-benefit analyses in the fields of education, health and HIV, on the basis of which VSO could contact one or more authors for a verification of our hypothesis that it is not possible to conduct sound cost-benefit analyses of VSO's work, or at least not with the data available and within the time span allocated to this assignment. VSO has not pursued this yet, but may choose to do so in time for the final SGA review. This means that there are no cost-benefit analyses in this IPR.

Additional methods

Coffey's evaluation guidance afforded the evaluators considerable flexibility, which allowed us to select additional methods that are not mentioned in the Evaluation Strategy. Specifically, we employed:

- Trailing of numbers, as described above; and
- Swim lanes to disaggregate and analyse the steps of programme implementation and reporting processes. These exercises answered questions related to the three Es of Economy (will this process consistently lead to the best possible procurement decisions?), Effectiveness (does this process achieve what it aims to do?) and Efficiency (is it possible to take steps out of this process?).

2.1.4 Analytical framework

Where possible, we have used the frameworks provided by Coffey's Evaluation Strategy. For example, the section titled *Summary achievements against evaluation criteria* follows the 13 evaluation criteria and colour-coded rating definitions that Coffey provided in its Appendix 5.2.

Coffey's guidance does not cover *all* issues that affected VSO's performance. To do justice to VSO's multidimensional change programme, we proposed using the [EFQM](#) framework of capacity. We felt that the framework would be appropriate because of its emphasis on partnerships and because of VSO's recent investments in issues related to its people (including volunteers), policies and processes, which are all important components of VSO's change programme and emphasised in the EFQM framework.

VSO did not support an EFQM approach because the organisation had completed a similar diagnostic exercise in 2011, as part of developing its strategic change programme. Instead, VSO encouraged us to use a reasonable alternative that required much less senior management time, which was to complement Coffey's guidance with a few of Kaplan's dimensions of NGO capacity, and specifically looked at VSO's organisational structure, systems, policies and procedures.⁵

⁵ We have followed Coffey's guidelines for Kaplan's other dimensions of organisational capacity (i.e. external relations, acquisition of knowledge and skills, and financial and material resources).

2.1.5 Approach to quality assurance of research

To ensure that the research and its findings were robust VSO used the services of:

- One external peer reviewer in the tender selection stage.
- Two external peer reviewers for the review of the inception report.
- One external peer reviewer to assess the draft IPR report, the way we have processed the external reviewer's and VSO's comments to this draft report, and the final report.

In addition, we:

- Produced weekly progress reports.
- Shared and discussed all tentative finding with the staff involved on an ongoing basis, and reviewed whatever new evidence VSO presented us with to bolster and/or modify these findings.
- Ended each country programme assessment with an immediate on-site face to face debriefing and discussion of our findings.
- Produced country reports for each country visit (all included in Annex G).
- Presented and discussed our preliminary findings at a VSO meeting that took place on 9 October, and considered the feedback VSO provided on the basis of this meeting.

Lastly, we proposed to make an arrangement for ITAD and the VSO consultants' team to peer review each other's IPR-related work (ITAD conducted the Oxfam IPR) but VSO declined the suggestion on the (sound) basis that the external quality assurance arrangements were already satisfactorily robust.⁶

2.2 Research problems encountered

Documentation

The following issues were relatively common:

Issue	Example	Our approach
Documentation may exist but was untraceable.	We did not see evidence of activities that followed up on a three-month HIV-related study visit of VSO partners to Manchester.	We used phrases such as 'we have not seen evidence of ...', and we remained open to assess additional evidence until the day the final IPR report was due.
Documents were not mutually consistent.	This was a problem with financial documentation and documentation related to the logframe in particular.	In such cases we talked with knowledgeable people within VSO, until both parties felt that an accurate picture had emerged.
Documents seemed inconsistent with raw data.	On the basis of in-country volunteer deployment lists we concluded that the volunteer early return rate of VSO PNG is 43%, but VSO's worldwide spread sheet,	We pointed out the inconsistency.

⁶ Email from Andrew Caffery, 6 September 2012.

	which uses calculations that we have not seen, reports a PNG early return rate of 28%.	
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Planning issues

- In PNG, the school visits had been planned on days on which the schools turned out to be closed and this means that we have been unable to talk with pupils in PNG.
- In Tanzania, a plane cancellation meant that we were unable to cross-check hospital patient records.

2.3 Strengths and weaknesses of selected evaluation design and research methods in retrospect

Key strengths

- VSO granted us the possibility of conducting six one-week country assessments. We selected these countries on the basis of criteria which ensured that the visits reflected VSO's rich diversity, and this enabled us to develop a picture that is likely to be fairly representative of VSO's work.
- When we developed this review's Inception Report, we agreed to use VSO's Value Chain rather than its Theory of Change as the frame around which we built the assessment design. This choice was a sound one, as the Value Chain is much more specific and served as a check list that helped us to focus our visits, activities and questions.

Key weaknesses

- At the start of the assignment, we did not yet know that we would find an absence of post-closure evaluations. In view of this absence, it would have been better to incorporate a few such evaluations in this IPR as, without them, we lacked the evidence required to assess the sustainable impact that VSO has had on its partners.
- Initially, the country assessments were based on a random selection of partners. However, the travelling involved proved to be unduly time consuming, and in later visits we shifted to cluster visits (i.e. a system whereby we selected the first partner randomly and then also visited the partners in this partner's vicinity).
- Because of the selection of countries we visited, our assessments have largely focused on VSO's deployment of international volunteers. This is only one of the types of volunteering that VSO supports.

3 Findings

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Performance assessment against logframe

Coffey on the performance assessment against logframe

The extent to which grantees have delivered on outputs and achieved the changes indicated in their logframes. In the first annual review this will largely assess outputs, while subsequent reviews will be able to increasingly assess outcomes. The assessment will be of the whole organization or of the part of an organization's programme covered by the SGA.

Appropriateness of the logframe and indicators

There have been four versions of the SGA logframe:

1. VSO submitted the first version in November 2010. It compounds all services (maternal and reproductive health, HIV, basic education and economic self-reliance) and this means that translating progress in an output-to-purpose review would be problematic.
2. VSO submitted its second version in June 2011, after input from Coffey. This version reflects outcomes from the People First strategic exercise, and elements of VSO's Theory of Change. Baselines and milestones are populated on the basis of VSO's 2010-11 baseline exercise.
3. VSO submitted its third version in May 2012. This late submission "was an exceptional agreement, 14 months after the start of the programme, so that VSO could include robust data from its new M&E system."⁷ This version attempts to disaggregate the sectors so that reporting on quality health, HIV, education and livelihoods are distinct (while work on disability, gender, participation and governance remain grouped together) and this causes the logframe to lose parts of its baseline information and targets since these cannot be disaggregated. In its 'Feedback on VSO Annual Report 2011-12,' DFID's Jo Cooke reflects on this version and makes a number of critical observations.
4. VSO submitted its fourth and current version in October 2012. In this version, VSO has "created through aggregation, a new high level 'summary' VSO Log frame that aligns with key aspects of the VSO Theory of Change."⁸ This aggregation reduces the usefulness of the logframe as it distinguishes neither *extent* of impact (a problem of all four versions) nor *type* of impact (a new problem). In this logframe, somebody whose livelihood has changed profoundly, and a child whose teacher participated in a one-day teacher training course both count as 'one beneficiary' as they are both considered to be 'poor and marginalised people [who] have improved lives through access to basic services in Education, Health, Disability, Livelihoods and HIV/AIDS services.'

Instead of reworking the logframe once again, we recommend to focus on the underpinning problems, which are addressed in the next section.

Assessment of the quality of the data sources which informed reporting against the logframe

In some countries, VSO carefully predicts and calculates the number of its beneficiaries. In other countries, it does not, and this compromises the quality of VSO's global logframe numbers. There are six main issues, and we cover them in turn:

Issue	Example
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⁷ Feedback on VSO Annual Report 2011-12, page 1. VSO explained that this third revision was the consequence of a change in the logframe structure, as imposed by DFID.

⁸ From the email covering note from Andrew Caffery to Jo Cooke, 16 October 2012. VSO explained to us that it had produced this aggregated version in response to a suggestion that DFID has made during a VSO-DFID meeting. The possibility is not mentioned in DFID's Feedback on VSO Annual Report 2011-12.

Issue	Example																																
<p>No worldwide measurement protocol.⁹ An aggregation of beneficiary figures across programmes and countries is difficult. Some of the difficulties could be addressed by a global measurement protocol that ensures that comparable programmes are measured in comparable ways. Such protocol does not exist.</p>	<p>In more than one country, VSO conducts teacher training. The ultimate beneficiaries are these pupils. As there is no global measurement protocol, country offices could, hypothetically, choose to assume that (with a calculation that is based on the assumption of 100 teachers with an average of 40 pupils each):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half the teachers will change their practices and half their current pupils will benefit from this (1,000 ultimate beneficiaries). • All the teachers will change their practices and all their current pupils will benefit from this (4,000 ultimate beneficiaries). • All the teachers will change their practices and all their pupils in the next five years will benefit from this (20,000 ultimate beneficiaries). 																																
<p>No in-country measurement protocol. Staff come and go. Documentation that covers logframe-related choices, assumptions and measurement techniques helps to ensure that logframe measurements are consistent longitudinally. Not all countries have such documentation.</p>	<p>The reason that the example mentioned in the previous row was hypothetical rather than specific was that we did not see evidence of the way the numbers of ultimate beneficiaries was measured, in the field of teacher training. We have seen a teacher training programme in Tanzania and in PNG, but we did not receive an overview of the calculations and assumptions that placed the logframe measurements in context. We did not see evidence that next year’s measurements will be on the basis of the same measurement principles.</p>																																
<p>Incorrect attribution. We have not seen any evidence of VSO considering other efforts or broader trends when attributing impact to its interventions.</p>	<p>In a district in which VSO works in the field of education, in Ghana, there was evidence that a total of ten agencies¹⁰ are working in education, but their work was not considered when reporting on progress. Moreover, improvements seem to have been part of a broader trend that is not attributable to VSO. With the reported figures in bold:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="603 1444 1404 1818"> <thead> <tr> <th>Period</th> <th># taking final exam</th> <th># passing</th> <th>% pass rate</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2004/5</td> <td>790</td> <td>255</td> <td>32.3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2005/6</td> <td>787</td> <td>330</td> <td>41.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2006/7</td> <td>1034</td> <td>536</td> <td>53.8</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2007/8</td> <td>1440</td> <td>374</td> <td>26.2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2008/9</td> <td>1703</td> <td>731</td> <td>42.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2009/10 (when VSO/TENI programme started)</td> <td>1652</td> <td>749</td> <td>57.5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2010/11</td> <td>2132</td> <td>1271</td> <td>59.6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Period	# taking final exam	# passing	% pass rate	2004/5	790	255	32.3	2005/6	787	330	41.9	2006/7	1034	536	53.8	2007/8	1440	374	26.2	2008/9	1703	731	42.9	2009/10 (when VSO/TENI programme started)	1652	749	57.5	2010/11	2132	1271	59.6
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⁹ There is a sensible six-page guidance document titled ‘VSO’s Global Impact and Results,’ which is helpful and provides definitions of categories such as ‘ultimate beneficiaries’ but is incomplete without the protocol.

¹⁰ Including World Vision and WSL working on school development, and CARE, CAMFED and RAINS working on promoting girls education.

Issue	Example
<p>Unverifiable and incorrect numbers, double-counting, and invalid criteria.</p>	<p>VSO scanned numerical data centrally, for obvious inaccuracies,¹¹ but many imperfections remained. Where we were able to verify numbers¹² we sometimes found:¹³</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Heroic assumptions’: in PNG, each pupil of each teacher who participated in a teacher training programme is counted as a beneficiary. • Criteria that were invalid: in Cameroon, ‘treatment by staff’ was used as an indicator of ‘quality of HIV-related services.’ • Figures that were incorrect: in Ghana, we compared VSO’s numbers of children who had ‘completed quality education’ in a group of schools with the government’s official completion numbers of that same group of schools, and found that the VSO numbers were more than three times higher than reality (even when ignoring the word ‘quality’). • Double-counting: in Tanzania, an individual attending two courses is counted as two individuals. • Very large numbers were particularly unlikely to be verifiable: “In Zambia VSO reached 1 million women living with or affected by HIV and AIDS (PLWHA) through its work with a range of partners in HIV prevention, treatment, care and support” (page 9). We have seen a table that disaggregates this figure over VSO’s partners, but we have not seen evidence of an exercise that assesses the robustness of these data.
<p>Unfounded growth expectations. There is not always a coherent logic that suggests that growth projections are likely to be achieved.</p>	<p>Sometimes growth expectations do not have a verifiable foundation, though the figures can be very specific (e.g. the Ghana country office states to have reached 328,228 beneficiaries in 2011-12, and intends to grow this number to 1,462,216 beneficiaries in 2012/13).</p>
<p>Resource wastage. The lack of guidance leads to time-consuming (yet ultimately unproductive) logframe-related efforts.</p>	<p>The PNG office spent a lot of time calculating logframe achievements, but felt somewhat in the dark about the best ways in which to go about the exercise. In Namibia, staff got frustrated about having worked hard to gather baseline data for 9 HIV partners, only to be told that there was no need to gather information related to the milestones (because the organisation was exiting from Namibia).</p>

At national level, some logframe numbers are meaningful, the consequence of careful thinking, backed up with a clear measurement protocol, and in line with both VSO’s strategy (People First)

¹¹ for example Ethiopia gave an outstandingly high figure for practitioners trained that was found to be total number of students within a Teacher Training College

¹² This was not always the case as we could not always find the underpinning data and calculation principles.

¹³ All of these bullets are examples of types of findings, not ‘stand-alone’ findings.

and national priorities. However, fundamental data flaws are common and these flaws cause VSO’s global SGA logframe to be much less useful than it could be.

Recommendation 1

1. The current logframe cannot be used as an assessment’s reference point. This is partly because of the variable quality of the data that fed into this logframe, and can therefore not be fixed by producing a fifth version.
2. Instead of reworking the logframe once again, we recommend to focus on the underpinning problem, which is the way VSO gathers data. This requires:
 - An organisation will (VSO *wants* to do it),
 - A funding and work plan issue (M&E is incorporated in budget and time frames),
 - A methodological issue (VSO incorporates contribution analysis into its assessments to reduce the risk of broader trends and other support initiative blurring VSO’s contribution),
 - Protocol and the documentation of choices at national and global level.
3. Ideally, data are gathered on an ongoing basis, but data reporting is limited to fixed times of the year. Currently, country offices are struggling with the information they have to provide. This is partly because not all offices are used to grant management and the reporting that comes with this, and partly because VSO International’s demand are more frequent and variable than would be ideal (the annual reports are due in February but the last major logframe exercise, for example, was in June).
4. Once the underpinning problems have been resolved, it would be wise to look at the logframe again. This is likely to take a few years, and the SGA final review may not have a new and improved worldwide logframe to compare results with.
5. VSO and DFID have to agree on an alternative before the final reviewers start their work. Two possibilities would be to:
 - Find the country offices with the most robust *national* logframes, and ask them to prepare for a contribution analysis. These national logframes and contribution analyses could jointly form the final review’s reference points.
 - Make an inventory of all external evaluations that have been conducted in the past few years, and utilise them to inform VSO’s next SGA Annual Review.

Assessment of grantees progress in addressing DFID’s feedback

DFID’s feedback covers five distinct areas:

DFID’s observations	VSO’s feedback and follow up action	IPR observations
The logframe is not fully and correctly populated, uses unrepresentative samples, uses ‘reach indicators’ that DFID does not accept, confuses impact with outcome	VSO acknowledged logframe weaknesses and has produced a fourth version, in which it tried to accommodate DFID’s critical observations.	VSO’s logframe-related issues are fundamental and have not been resolved in the logframe’s fourth version of October 2012. Instead, the underpinning problems need to be addressed. This requires a global and country-level protocol. More fundamentally, VSO requires building a results-focused and assessment-inclined organisational mind set.

DFID's observations	VSO's feedback and follow up action	IPR observations
indicators, and lacks information on inputs and evidence used.		
The annual review is insufficiently focused.	<p>In its response, VSO states that many of the “comments about the annual review stem from deficiencies in the log frame.” The organisation commits to addressing these deficiencies as a matter of priority and states that “this will provide the basis required for us to produce high quality annual reviews in future.”</p> <p>The response adds that, in the interim, “the IPR will provide an independent view on the evidence that exists on aspects of the matters that you raise” (VSO response, page 2).</p>	We did review available evidence, but found that this evidence is not sufficiently robust. The implication is that many of our statements related to the performance of the organisation are tentative and based on country case studies rather than conclusive organisation-wide evidence.
The reporting on learning is limited and VSO's involvement in the Learning Partnership is disappointing.	VSO states that it has already taken action to intensify its involvement in the Learning Partnership.	DFID's feedback focused on one particular component of learning. In several other dimensions of learning, VSO performs relatively strongly (as is discussed in section 3.3.1 on 'Learning').
The review only measures additionality in terms of programme scale.	VSO does not offer a way forward, other than in the form of the IPR, and hopes for further dialogue with and guidance from DFID's Civil Society Team.	The SGA grant provides such a large proportion of VSO's overall funding that its impact cannot be separated from VSO's overall impact. Without SGA, VSO would not have survived without dramatically downscaling its operations.
The case studies are incomparable and lack depth.	VSO promised to “share additional examples with DFID's Civil Society team, and with DFID's Learning Groups, which we believe demonstrate our analytical qualities and provide a fuller picture of how we are helping to change the lives of poor people.”	VSO has not yet shared any case studies with DFID, and intends to develop two of them by March 2013. ¹⁴ We have reviewed 33 other VSO case studies and found that none of them could be used in present form, but that several of them could potentially provide the depth and comparability that

¹⁴ Email from Andrew Caffery to Willem van Eekelen, 16 October 2012.

DFID's observations	VSO's feedback and follow up action	IPR observations
		DFID requested (though possibly not without further research). ¹⁵

3.1.2 Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Coffey on 'improving lives'

An assessment of the extent and the manner of changes in the lives of poor and marginalized people as a result of the changes achieved, and the extent to which these changes are likely to be sustained. It is recognised that agency reporting in this area is likely to be illustrative of changes, rather than comprehensive across the portfolio.

Ideally, a verification exercise proceeds as it did when we were looking at an education project in Tanzania:

Verifying impact

We visited two primary schools in Tanzania. They both provided us with the gender and overall number of pupils who had been enrolled in Standard 7 in the previous year, and the gender and number of children who had passed their P7 exam. This enabled us to calculate the pass rate. We cross-checked this pass rate with the pass rate listings that a VSO volunteer (who was deployed at the district's Rural Council) had gathered for each of the 31 schools that VSO had worked with. The rates were identical, confirming that VSO's figures were correct.

On average, the pass rates of children in VSO-affected schools showed a year on year improvement. This improvement exceeded, by 11-12%, the improvement in pass rates by *all* district schools.

In this particular case, it was possible to follow the trail from the schools where final year pupil numbers were listed to the school average; and from the school average to the average for all VSO-affected schools in the district. It was also possible to compare this with a broader group of schools to confirm that the increasing pass rates were not merely a district trend. There was one other variable that might partially explain the faster progress, and this was the relative proximity of the VSO schools to the Regional Education Office. This proximity seems insufficient to explain the performance difference between the VSO-affected and the district's other schools. We therefore conclude that, in this case, VSO has had a verifiably positive impact on the lives of children.

In the majority of projects we have assessed as part of this IPR, it was impossible to verify success in the way described above. Often, assessments either do not take place or are based on self-assessments that are useful for a range of purposes but not very useful as progress assessment tools (see the last text box in section 3.3.3). VSO's assessments rarely isolate VSO impact by comparing progress with longer trends and the progress of the VSO target group with a control group. It struck us that:

- There is a thirst to understand programme impact, but this has not yet led to external evaluations, which seem exclusively prompted by donor requirements.

¹⁵ We looked at each of the 23 case studies for its DFID reporting (see VSO (2012) *Supporting Documentary Information – case studies for DFID report 2012*), and at ten case studies as they are described online.

- We have not found *a single example* of a post-closure evaluation even though, for the type of contribution VSO aims to make, assessing the organisation’s impact a few years after it exited from a programme is critical to demonstrate long-term, sustainable impact. This is a missed opportunity and one that could be seized relatively easily because of VSO’s relatively large proportion of unrestricted funding, which places the organisation in an unusually strong position to conduct such post-closure evaluations.

This lack of impact assessment tradition means that the remainder of this section is tentative, and based on the incomplete evidence we were able to gather during six one-week country assessments in Cambodia, Ghana, Laos, Namibia, PNG and Tanzania. This evidence suggests that the impact ranges from profound to negligible – with no evidence to make robust statements related to the frequency of each part of the spectrum. To illustrate the spectrum, we give an indication of what best, expected, and worst case scenarios seem to look like.

Best case scenario: substantial long term impact

An example

VSO’s Peter Credoc introduced rice cultivation to the highlands of PNG, and the impact has been profound, wide-reaching, long-lasting and directly attributable to VSO and its partners. The initial success is rooted in the volunteer’s expertise (‘this crop would grow well in this region’) and partnership (‘here is a school garden in which to show the potential’). The subsequent and widespread replication that was based on buy-in from the authorities (which provide rice mills) and a strong and direct incentive on the side of the individual (‘if I do this my income will increase’).

We have seen evidence suggesting that VSO contributed meaningfully to sustainably improved education practices and curricula; sustainably increased agricultural yields; substantial medical progress; and a louder civil society voice. In all cases of profound success, we got the sense that either VSO or a pro-active, creative and driven expert volunteer had found an opportunity to innovate, and the partner and the ultimate beneficiaries had a strong incentive to adopt this innovation. We will explore this in more detail in sub-sections 3.3.2 (‘Innovation’) and 3.4.1 (‘Value for Money assessment’). In section 3.4.2 (‘Effectiveness’, in the sub-section titled ‘Programme Effectiveness’) we present a recommendation in relation to prioritising such success stories in VSO’s M&E work.

Typical scenario: short term and some longer term impact

An example

TKMOAMS is a small Namibian CBO that supports families living with HIV by strengthening the knowledge and skills of community based carers and representing their voice to the relevant duty bearers (ART providers and Government). VSO has partnered with TKMOAMS since 2002. Initial volunteer inputs created a profile and presence for the organisation, and contributed to the construction of a building from which community activities are organised. Later inputs have helped mobilise resources to keep the organisation functioning – albeit at reduced level.

To what extent the impact of VSO volunteers is sustained depends on the leadership and staff of this CBO being able to ensure its survival¹⁶ and continuing to be of use to the families they seek to serve. The decline in level of coverage and activities indicates that peak achievements have not been sustainable.

¹⁶ Their continued existence seems fairly certain for the short term future, as the organisation benefits from donor support and local links with relevant authorities and health providers. It seems reasonable to attribute some of the credit for this to VSO’s volunteers.

Tentatively, it seems that much depends on the partnership assessment and design, and on the way in which the volunteer's role is or is not embedded in the organisation. We explore this further in section 3.3.3 ('Partnership working.')

Worst case scenario

In VSO's annual review, the worst case scenario case study is a complex scenario where VSO managed to achieve meaningful results in the most challenging of environments. This is not a good representation of VSO's worst case scenario.

A few examples

Damage: In the context of VSO, initial engagement with partners typically results in a commitment to place one or more expert volunteers. Sometimes, it proves impossible to identify a volunteer who fits the bill.¹⁷ This causes time loss and frustration.

Absence of impact: Volunteers are sometimes placed in a partner that is unable to utilise them adequately. They regularly return early, frustrated about their failure to make an impact.¹⁸

Minimal impact

Underutilisation of volunteers seems common. Sometimes volunteers leave as a consequence (such as the Dutch agronomist who found himself playing the role of English language teacher), but in many other cases both the partners and the volunteers gradually adapt their expectations and find a middle ground that is useful but not *as* useful as the volunteer could have been in a more conducive environment. We have seen a number of volunteers who spent most of their time on language lessons, ICT support, or the implementation of minor down-stream projects that neither innovate nor feature significant trickle down or multiplier effects. This minimum impact turns into negative impact if one considers the opportunity costs: the alternative for expert volunteers is not to be idle but to play a meaningful role elsewhere.

We have seen examples where impact has been minor or negligible. This is the case when placements are not filled, volunteers do not complete their assignment, volunteers choose not to build on the work of their predecessors and instead start the same thing from scratch,¹⁹ volunteers do not have a counterpart and are therefore unlikely to leave a legacy,²⁰ or when volunteers implement projects that do not require foreign expertise. In all these examples, it is clear what VSO should focus its attention on.

In addition to this, we saw several examples of work that fails even though the opportunity seemed so obvious, the work had been designed carefully, and the implementation had been thorough. In such cases, VSO needs to understand *why* initiatives fail.

¹⁷ We have not seen the figures but understood that the placement rate is some 80%.

¹⁸ The worldwide early return rate is 22%, but only a portion of these early returns is caused by frustration about the placement. Note that this 22% early return rate is taken from a VSO excel sheet that lists the early return rates by country. We have only verified this for one country – PNG – and found that VSO's calculation (which amounted to 28% in PNG) were different from our own calculations (which amounted to 43% in PNG).

¹⁹ 'The first thing I did was tear up the work of my predecessor, as it was useless.'

²⁰ 'It is an exciting life, but I'm not getting anywhere.'

The need to understand *why* initiatives fail

Everybody loved Ben Williams. In Madang he is by far the most frequently mentioned volunteer. He is widely admired for his modesty ('he always came on his bicycle') and his work ('he was just so helpful and he knew very much about many things').

Ben tried hard to build on the work of his predecessors, but schools asked him to respond to entirely new requests instead. Ben delivered much-appreciated in-service training and inspired schools to form the 'Madang Group.' Together, they undertook a number of initiatives. Some of these initiatives died quickly (e.g. the desire to gain basic computer skills disappeared after two lessons) but other initiatives were seen through until the end, and the resulting tools – manuals, check lists – are still on the schools' shelves.

But the Madang Group has not met since Ben left the province; most teachers never did the exercises he asked them to do at the end of his many in-service training sessions; and several of the resources that he and other volunteers had helped develop are not being used. 'He did such a good job... but you know what we are like... we do not follow up.'

We explore possible reasons for such failures in the section 3.4.2 ('Effectiveness').

3.2 Relevance

3.2.1 Representativeness

Coffey on representativeness

The degree to which the supported civil society organisations represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies, (including where relevant the poorest and most marginalized). This will include an assessment of whether the planned interventions, as described in the logframe, continue to respond to these needs and priorities.

VSO's Value Chain (covered in section 4.2) and Theory of Change are frameworks that follow a powerful logic that links action to relevant outcomes. If acted on with care, they will ensure that VSO represents and responds to the needs and priorities of the poorest and most marginalized groups in the organisation's countries of operation.

VSO is integrating its Theory of Change in the thinking and practice of its programmes, and the SGA final review will be able to assess the impact this process will have had. For now, and looking at the practice of VSO programmes, we saw three ways in which VSO works to ensure that the needs and priorities of a country's poorest and most marginalised groups are met:

1. by inspiring duty bearers to consider the poorest and most marginalised constituents;
2. by building the duty bearers' capacity to serve the poorest and most marginalised constituents;
3. by strengthening the voice of the rights holders.

We cover them in turn, and conclude with a note on the nature of international volunteering, which is the volunteering model that this IPR has focused most of its attention on.

Inspiring duty bearers to consider the poorest and most marginalised constituents

The case of Lao's agricultural service providers

Lao's provincial agricultural service providers are not traditionally farmer-focused. By means of illustration:

- We did not see a single farmer in the two extension and research centres we visited, and very limited evidence of extension workers engaging in out-of-centre activities;
- Neither extension centre is currently providing training activities; and
- The employees of the Nongdeng Centre in particular could only very partially explain in what way the various activities were meant to benefit the region's farmers.

This contrasted sharply with the volunteers' regular village visits and their community-based seeding and livestock activities. Conceivably, these volunteers could inspire staff to follow suit.

We have seen no evidence that this does indeed happen. Farmer-focused work does not seem to be part of these centres' DNA, and VSO's role models are unlikely to single-handedly change this. However, this might change if VSO were to employ a combination of provincial role model volunteers **and** nationally-placed expertise that would support the Lao Government's quest to progress on its agenda of increasing accountability and reducing corruption. This combination might help to gradually change the DNA of these service providers.²¹

Duty bearers do not necessarily focus on their poorest and most marginalised constituents.²² In countries around the world, Ministries of Education invest disproportionately in higher and university education, and underinvest in primary and informal education; Ministries of Health often favour curative health care facilities in capital cities over preventative health care programmes in rural areas; and Ministries of Agriculture tend to favour large-scale farming over smallholders. We have seen VSO efforts in each of these fields, and these efforts may occasionally inspire duty bearers, or individuals therein, to refocus attention in favour of people and communities who are not automatically seen and heard.

Building the duty bearers' capacity to serve the poorest and most marginalised constituents

The case of the education authorities of PNG

For over 50 years, VSO has worked with the education authorities of PNG. We have not seen thorough assessments that allow us to make definite statements about the impact of this partnership, but we interviewed well over 20 counterparts who were all fairly or very positive about the partnership.²³

On average and on the basis of anecdotal evidence, we got the impression that the building of the capacity of duty-bearers is probably VSO's strongest-performing field of work. But we are not certain, as this is one of the most under-researched areas of VSO operations.

In this field of work, VSO's key challenge is to identify and contribute to the areas where duty bearers' lack of progress is not caused by indifference or resistance (unless this is to be addressed by VSO's 'political volunteers') but by lack of expertise.

²¹ Note that this was the logic behind VSO's 'Programme Area Plans,' a model that was introduced in the mid-00s and has since been abandoned.

²² This makes VSO's common approach to work within the partners' strategy and on the basis of the partners' priorities a risky one.

²³ To the point of the authorities often paying the volunteers' salaries. More remarkable: the Simbu authorities have given VSO a land rover.

Strengthening the voice of the rights holders

The case of Tanzania's smallholders

The Agricultural Non State Actors Forum (ANSAF) is a network of CSO and private sector organisations established in 2006 to explore best practices in the agricultural sector and make policy proposals to government, donor and other development agencies to act on problematic areas. VSO was a founder member of ANSAF and supported the organisation with a one-year volunteer and, later, a political volunteer (a British MP).

The Annual Country Review states that a petition from this VSO partner has persuaded the Government of Tanzania to make new commitments to farmers. Reality is more modest: ANSAF added 1,200 signatures to the 17,000 signatures collected by Bono's advocacy organisation ONE, in a petition that aimed to inspire the Government of Tanzania to investment more in the agricultural sector of the country's poorest regions, and in smallholder farmers. Notwithstanding this qualification: this petition was presented to the Head of State, received good media coverage, was seen as ground breaking, and may translate into a reallocation of resources in favour of smallholder farmers within the poorer districts.

VSO has contributed to the creation and current capacity of ANSAF, which has proved able to contribute to lobbying, on behalf of Tanzania's smallholder farmers, at the highest level. This is not solely attributable to VSO and has yet to yield new commitments to farmers, but is nevertheless a very promising example of VSO strengthening the voice of the right holders.

Though the Annual Review exaggerates VSO's role, this example does illustrate VSO's ability to support the rights holders.

We have seen several examples of VSO exaggerating its role, and of claims that may be true but that are not supported by robust evidence. However, we also saw an example of the opposite. In Laos, CUSO-VSO is playing a prominent yet low-key role²⁴ in the development of the country's embryonic civil society sector. This role takes three forms:

- **Support to create civil society.** CUSO-VSO Lao has spun off a few CSOs that are becoming increasingly visible as independent organisations. These organisations are still small and fragile, but they are also some of the country's earliest CSOs, with clear and attractive remits, increasing visibility, and – partly thanks to the work of CUSO-VSO Lao - confident and competent leaders.
- **Support to coordinate civil society's work.** CUSO-VSO Lao supports coordination and cross-fertilisation amongst both national and international NGOs by strategically placing volunteers in umbrella organisations. Because civil society is so young, intelligent design might be able to prevent common problems from occurring, with the sector. For example: the CUSO-VSO Lao volunteers are working to develop a culture where a single report is acceptable to multiple donor agencies – oh, how much time would be saved if this is going to be the norm!
- **Develop civil society staff.** Through one of its spin-off CSOs, CUSO-VSO Lao supports the development of a new pool of national CSO professionals, through a programme of national volunteering (with a focus on female volunteers from ethnic minorities). Interviews confirmed that most of these volunteers would not have entered the sector without this volunteering programme.

²⁴ This is deliberate and sensible in a country that does not have a rich CSO history. To avoid falling victim to sensitivities, CUSO-VSO calls its CSO programme a 'livelihoods programme.'

The nature of international volunteering

VSO utilises and supports a wide variety of volunteering models but, in terms of budgets and staff attention, the work related to international volunteers outweighs the sum total of all other models.

These international volunteers:

- are, upon arrival, not yet intimately familiar with the country and the communities they aim to serve;
- need time to settle and do not normally stay for many years;
- may face very substantial language obstacles;
- work through partners rather than directly with the people and communities they aim to serve;
- live daily lives that are sometimes close to but sometimes far removed from these people and communities.

Notwithstanding these challenges, volunteers often adequately help their placement organisations to represent their constituency. This is partly the consequence of three things that VSO invests heavily in:

- **A careful selection of volunteers.** A volunteer ‘old-timer’ compared his selection 30 years ago and now, and found that today’s recruitment process is much more focused on qualities such as resilience, humour, improvisation skills and cultural sensitivity.
- **A thorough pre-departure training and post-arrival induction process.** The volunteers find this useful and found it easy to give examples of ways in which the process had helped them (from dress code and language to practical arrangements and the benefits of talcum powder).²⁵
- **Attracting seasoned experts.** The four volunteers in Goroka, PNG, are all learning-inclined ex-heads of schools with previous cross-cultural exposure and knowledge that cuts across a range of teaching dimensions (e.g. direct teaching, school management, curriculum development, special needs). Often, such seasoned and culturally sensitive professionals will be able to implement international good practice principles even in absence of a lengthy exposure to a particular culture. To give just one very obvious example: interactive teaching techniques generally work better than one-directional teaching – also, fairly quickly, in cultures that are not accustomed to classroom participation and even, at least partially, in institutions that are resistant to change.

VSO’s attention to the combination of technical skills and the less tangible but important traits that help people to thrive in a different culture increases the chance of international volunteers serving, not merely as expert advisors, but as catalysts for change.

3.2.2 Targeting

Coffey on targeting

The extent to which the interventions target the poorest and most marginalized, and the extent to which they target in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit. These targeting strategies are likely

²⁵ Most volunteers were very positive about the preparation process, and many volunteers said things such as “VSO pre-departure training was critical in ensuring volunteers do not ‘talk down to their partners’ but listen and ask questions and observe which I believe is the USP of VSO volunteers [...] To really appreciate the value of exchange of skills and knowledge.” Not all volunteers were unambiguously positive. One volunteer who was able to compare the training programmes of the Australian Volunteers International (AVI) and VSO described the transition to VSO as a ‘step down.’ Another volunteer, who was able to compare today’s VSO training programme with VSO’s training programme of 30 years ago felt that ‘lots of pre-departure training disappeared; with this pre-departure training VSO managed to turn technical specialists into development professionals’.

to be mutually exclusive, and the assessment will reflect on the way in which the balance between them has been struck. This will include an assessment of whether the targeting continues to be relevant.

Country selection

The first step of VSO's 8-step Value Chain is about the "identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies."

In this context, and admirably in a sector in which funding availability is often the most important criterion, VSO has recently conducted a worldwide review of its countries of operation that was based on a range of poverty- and fundability-related criteria. This review led to the decision to close a few VSO offices, and to open an office in South Sudan.

Country strategies

VSO's country strategies are often underpinned by consultations with some or all of its current partners, volunteers,²⁶ donor agencies and - more rarely - potential beneficiary groups.²⁷ This is not always systematically recorded,²⁸ but staff members involved relate extensive periods during which focus group discussions and partner meetings were held.

With or without elaborate consultations: the VSO country strategies often focus on the sectors that current partners work in,²⁹ and they are very broad. The one for PNG, for example, covers elementary, primary, secondary, college and informal education; partners at national, provincial and district level; and partnerships with government authorities, churches, NREs and community-based organisations.³⁰

It may well be sensible to have such a wide-ranging strategy, because VSO's key strength is innovative and quality-focused niche work (as we explore in section 3.3.2) and such work may be done at various levels and with a wide range of partners.³¹ From a discussion with the GLT,³² we understand that country offices were, for this very reason, discouraged from developing tightly focused strategies.

Wide strategies should not lead to donor-driven programming³³ and, among other things, this requires particularly careful decisions in relation to regional focus, sectoral choice and partners.

²⁶ Sometimes volunteers play a pivotal role. In Cambodia, VSO commissioned 30 short pieces of research on key development issues – all from volunteers.

²⁷ As was in the case of Cameroon, where VSO conducted widespread consultation with women's groups.

²⁸ But sometimes it is: we understood that PNG has a 200-page document that covers the consultations and background research (though we have not seen this document).

²⁹ As in: consultations with existing partners and volunteers often dominate strategy discussion, and a focus on consultation with women groups (to stay with the example of Cameroon) is likely to lead to a primary focus on this group.

³⁰ The Ghana strategy, which also allows for a very wide range of programmes, opens all remaining doors by adding that "The programme will also operate where external funding is available, or will be provided."

³¹ An additional reason could be that a wide strategy allows VSO to tap into a wide range of funding possibilities (without, of course, losing track of VSO's core aims and assets).

³² Preliminary presentation of findings, on 9 October 2012.

³³ Some volunteers already have this worry. 'Nowadays we are project-based and this means that you get donor-driven. Women, the environment? Yeah, OK.'

Regional focus

At one point, Tanzania had more than 100 volunteers, allocated throughout the country. Then, a few years ago, VSO focused its work on five key regions, “in order to achieve more tangible impact and be able to measure it”³⁴ and now the country office is reducing its geographical spread to three regions only: Zanzibar, Mtwara and Lindi & Kagera. The choice was made on the basis of these regions’ poverty status (they had to be in the bottom half),³⁵ VSO’s ability to deliver programmes in a cost-effective manner, and the presence or absence of strong partners.

Not all countries are quite so careful in their choices and explanations. VSO’s education programme in PNG seems to have selected its target provinces on the basis of history rather than poverty prevalence or educational achievements. The VSO Ghana Strategy announces a “shift of programme emphasis and inputs to the three northern regions”³⁶ without providing a rationale for this choice in the country strategy.

Sectoral focus

In preparation for the CUSO-VSO strategy for Lao, the office prepared a matrix that listed potential sectors,³⁷ and scored each of these sectors, on a five-point scale, on six dimensions.³⁸ The overall scores were then compared, as part of the decision on the sectors to focus on in the years to come.

Not all countries have undertaken a similar or indeed any sector comparison. Strategies always provide the reasons for VSO’s choice of sectors (and they are broadly in line with VSO’s Global Business Plan)³⁹, but we have not always seen a rationale for sectors that VSO country offices chose *not* to focus on (e.g. reasons for the PNG country office not to focus on livelihoods).

Partner choice and focus

Partnership issues are explored in section 3.3.3 (‘Partnership working’).

3.3 Effectiveness

3.3.1 Learning

Coffey on learning

The extent to which grantees learn from their work, and integrate the learning into improved programming, as well as the extent to which others (civil society, governmental and international organisations) make use of this learning in altered policy and practice.

³⁴ Quoted from the Tanzanian PPP of July 2011.

³⁵ The CUSO-VSO Lao office added a dimension by using country maps that showed poverty distribution in combination with population density.

³⁶ VSO Ghana Strategy 2012, page 8.

³⁷ Specifically: climate change, national volunteering, migration, pro-poor tourism, SME development, CSO development, gender issues, food security, primary health care, water and sanitation, and disability (in relation to unexploded ordinance, mortar or artillery shells or cluster bombs, or ‘UXO’).

³⁸ Specifically: fit to core programme focus, improving poor people’s access to quality services, promoting policies to support poor people, participation of socially-excluded groups, constraints (high constraint = low score), and opportunities for linkage to other programmes, funding etc.

³⁹ The Corporate Business Plan stipulates:

- Substantial growth in the scale of our health work.
- Sustain our work in education.
- Significant growth in our livelihood work.
- A reduction of dedicated HIV and AIDS programmes [though in practice HIV/Aids-related work is rebranded as health-related work.]
- Participation and Governance, gender equality and climate change.

In this section, we cover:

- Learning that strengthens VSO's organisational capacity;
- Learning for contextual knowledge;
- Learning to share with others.

Learning that strengthens organisational capacity

In the UK

VSO has a Learning and Development Strategy that works at individual, team/department, and organisational level, and all the usual learning tools and systems such as staff surveys, appraisal processes (standardised and improved in 2011), some sector benchmarking, learning retreats and training.⁴⁰ In addition, intensive learning underpinned a change programme that was fuelled by research, pro bono corporate support⁴¹ and new people with new fields of expertise and ideas.⁴² Many improvements are already visible, and many more are in the pipeline – and we cover some of them in section 3.4.2.

In country offices

Country offices often have systems such as the annual appraisal process, the usual monitoring activities, periodic reporting and the occasional retreat. We saw a post-it problem tree on a wall and several other bits of evidence of ongoing learning.

This learning is not often based on VSO's organisation-wide tools. Useful frames such as provided in 'The Path of Partnership,' by VSO's Value Chain and the VSO Behavioural Competency Framework (to name but a few) are not always known and not often used (or only used in the context of a post-hoc justification.)⁴³ In Tanzania, one practical example of how learning served to strengthen organisational capacity even led to an *alternative* to 'The Path of Partnership': VSO Tanzania developed, with the support of Randstad and on the basis of its learning in relation to partner capacity, its 'BCCD' (Building Concept for Capacity Development) tool, which it now regularly applies. This tool allows for action planning to address capacity challenges and to create a strong sense of ownership. It is easily facilitated by volunteers and less onerous in terms of time required than what is recommended in VSO's 'Path of Partnership.'⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Note that VSO reduced its expenditure on 'training and development' from £285k in 2010-11 to £189k in 2011-12 (see the spread sheet titled '6m DFID Savings explained - JP notes').

⁴¹ For example: six change-related working groups were led by Accenture, *Think Consulting* assisted as an external mentor during the development of VSO's Global Funding Plan, and Deloitte helped with VSO's thinking on ICT.

⁴² It is hard to say which parts of VSO's change process are inspired by learning from VSO's past, learning about sector-wide good practice, learning from (pro bono) corporate advice, learning by reflection and logical thinking, and learning-while-doing – but it does not really matter and it all counts as 'learning.'

⁴³ Perhaps these tools, which are powerful potential aids, would be more fully utilised if they were shorter, or promoted more aggressively, or developed with more field engagement. Note that the previous PPA review was much more positive when it reported that the PPA had "enabled VSO to listen to partners, and develop the 'Path to partnership.' This is a framework that guides all work with partners." (PPA Report of 2010, page 12.) Note also that this lack of widespread utilisation of VSO tools illustrates a weakness reported in the People Insight staff survey, in which less than half reported to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that "VSO operates as one joined up global organisation."

⁴⁴ The maximum BCCD scenario amounts to a series of structured discussions over a two-month period, whereas the Path of Partnership suggests that it can take "3 months up to 1 year to complete the full process."

Learning for contextual knowledge

In the short run, contextual learning is part and parcel of every placement. Volunteers and their partners say that the Terms of Reference does not always provide sufficient guidance⁴⁵ and that it takes time (up to a year, according to some people) for volunteers to find a way that enables them to make the fullest possible contribution. VSO staff tends to follow the volunteers' learning, and are generally well-informed about the strengths and drawbacks of partnerships. These insights sometimes inform choices about subsequent placements ('I do not think we will place another volunteer at this partner.')

Recommendation 2

Sometimes there is significant discrepancy between volunteers' Terms of Reference and the reality they find upon arrival. It might be possible to reduce this discrepancy by initiating a three-way engagement prior to the actual deployment. In this context, we note that:

- VSO's new Volunteer Journey plans for stronger and more direct interaction between volunteers, partners and VSO programmes. This means that separate follow up on this recommendation may not be necessary.
- VSO and its volunteers operate with partners that often work in challenging environments and face serious capacity constraints. This means that the discrepancy between volunteer expectations and reality is unlikely to fully disappear.

We have not seen evidence of longer term contextual learning. There were occasional accounts that suggested that long term contextual knowledge does exist ('PAFO Salavan had the exact same problems ten years ago') but such knowledge did not seem to tangibly impact on placement designs. In several of the countries we visited – Tanzania, Ghana and PNG – we found partnerships with government authorities that span half a century or more, but we did not find evidence of a single attempt to assess the impact of such longstanding partnerships, or what VSO had learned about this partner, in the course of these 50 years.

Recommendation 3

The introduction of multiyear partner-specific learning logs could help to ensure that learning is not lost over long periods of time.

Learning to share with others

DFID's Feedback on VSO Annual Report 2011-12 says that it "is particularly disappointing that VSO has not engaged much in the Learning Partnership. You have explained that you plan to engage more proactively in the coming year." In its response, VSO confirms that "we have not participated in DFID's Learning Groups and have already taken action to rectify this." This brief exchange does not do justice to the various ways in which VSO shares its learning.

⁴⁵ A typical example, from Laos: 'I had expected to work with the Steering Committee on the strategy, but in reality all I could do was to try to place the issue on the agenda. [...] I had expected to build systems, but in reality I did a lot of direct service delivery.' One reason for the discrepancy between the Terms of Reference and reality is related to the time that passes between the moment VSO and the partner agree on these Terms of Reference, and the arrival of the volunteer.

VSO is *about* sharing with other stakeholders, and a considerable part of this sharing seems to turn into adoption and replication of good practice and innovation. Within countries, this commonly happens in six different ways:

1. Sharing knowledge that benefits people directly. In Namibia, VSO's longstanding HIV awareness and prevention activities are likely to have changed some people's sexual behaviour.
2. Sharing knowledge that helps people help others. In Tanzania, teacher training and a number of other school support activities caused the percentage of pupils in VSO target schools that successfully completed primary education to increase.
3. Sharing knowledge that is utilised by partners. Following record-keeping training for its members, the Guinea Fowl Farmers Association (GUFFA) of Ghana will now be able to track 'star farmers.'
4. Replication across the country. In Cambodia, a volunteer supported the educational authorities with the development of an education manual which is now being rolled out across the country.
5. Sharing knowledge in inter-agency working groups. Also in Cambodia, a number of partners were positive about the policy engagement VSO staff had provided in the Education Sector Working Group (a group that includes government authorities and a range of national and international organisations).
6. Replication by other organisations. In PNG, parts of the concepts used by the Tokaut theatre groups (that move from village to village to convey HIV-related messages by means of theatre) seem to have been replicated by Save the Children.

There are also two types of international sharing:

7. Study trips. We have not seen evidence of impact analyses of such trips. For example: VSO arranged a three-month study visit to Manchester for the purpose of "partners strengthening their capacity to deliver quality HIV services" (Annual Review, page 8). Each participant developed a 'strategic action plan' but evidence of post-return application of learning was not traceable and we did not see evidence that VSO conducted documented follow up activities.
8. Verifiable contributions to the wider international development sector. Such contributions are made, such as in the case of the HIV-related discourse in southern Africa, its contributions to UNESCO's education discourse and recent work on volunteerism (with IDS).⁴⁶ However, VSO's *very foundation* is expertise – of its volunteers and its staff – and the organisation seems to punch well below its weight in international conferences, peer-reviewed journals, books and other means of disseminating insights, tools and good practice. VSO is already maintaining an inventory of VSO-attended conferences and seminars. To ensure the organisation's contributions are duly captured, VSO could build on this inventory by adding its other contributions to the wider international development sector.

3.3.2 Innovation

⁴⁶ Both areas are well-selected in terms of utilising VSO's particular fields of expertise. In the case of HIV, VSO's contributions made to the International AIDS Conference Washington and the UK AIDS Consortium focused on its niche of managing volunteers (in this case community and home-based carers).

Coffey on innovation

The extent to which grantees develop, test, and achieve the adoption by others of new knowledge, such as in techniques, approaches, and design of interventions. Innovation is a special type of learning. It is distinguished from learning in general by novelty.

VSO is innovating internally. The volunteer cycle is a good example of this: if all goes as planned,⁴⁷ the way VSO recruits, places, monitors and ends placements will soon all be revolutionised.

More fundamentally: VSO's primary assets are its volunteers' expertise and ability to import international good practice. This renders VSO ideally suited for innovative work. These are a few examples:

- In Tanzania, a VSO volunteer paediatrician developed a maternal and neonatal triage system that involves a simple checklist used to assess and monitor neonatal vital signs. This is a step change from assuming that a completed delivery is 'safe delivery.' Fatality rates for neonatal admissions fell from 41.2 to 28.5 per 1000 live births; from 20% amongst admissions to this hospital to 12.6%; and as word of these success rates spread through the community and among health workers the referral rate increased and there was a 2.5-fold increase in neonatal admissions. DFID reported that they are considering use of funds from an Innovation Fund to scale up this good practice.⁴⁸
- In Cambodia, VSO produced three example lessons, in Maths, Science and Khmer, which are used as an innovative teacher training method involving group learning. The VSO volunteer was able to pilot the DVDs in three of the training schools of the teacher training centres she supports in her role at the Battambang Provincial training centre. The volunteer said this was possible in Cambodia because of VSO Cambodia's strong relationship with the government, which allowed VSO the space to explore innovative pilots.
- In Laos, CUSO (later Cuso-VSO) introduced the country's first-ever volunteering programme that focuses on ethnic minorities.
- In PNG, rural school teachers lack books and teaching material. VSO is developing teaching material that can be sent by SMS. If this turns out to work, the design could be replicated in other countries.⁴⁹
- In Zambia, as the Annual Review reports, VSO supports the National Aids Control Council with an e-mapping system that is meant to help the Zambian authorities understand the availability, form and uptake of care and support services, including access to ART.⁵⁰

Innovative initiatives may work out, or not. This is the nature of innovation: it requires risk-taking and the recognition that innovation is a matter of trial and error. For example, we do not know if VSO's new SMS-based primary education project in PNG will succeed or not – but the initiative is a calculated risk, based on a small scale experiment (with a control group) which suggested that the intervention has potential. Whatever the outcome, the decision to develop this programme is a

⁴⁷ The Gantt chart on the implementation of this new volunteer cycle suggests that there are significant delays, compared to the original plans.

⁴⁸ VSO Tanzania is aware of its innovation potential: its country strategy focuses on testing pilots and finding things that are worthwhile for other stakeholders to replicate.

⁴⁹ This is not *radical* innovation, and many other SMS-based education-related initiatives exist (see the following hyperlinks, for example: [A](#), [B](#), [C](#), [D](#), and [E](#)), but the field of work is relatively young and VSO's work is likely to make incremental contributions to it.

⁵⁰ As with the previous example, this is not new in and by itself - many country level Aids Councils seek to establish similar systems because e-systems have potential to be cheaper, more up-to-date, and useful than the directory type of information gathering – but the field is young and incremental innovation seems entirely possible.

sound one as, ultimately and if the work is driven by calculated risks, the cost-benefit ratio of the sum total of innovative initiatives is likely to be a favourable one.

3.3.3 Partnership working

Coffey on partnerships

The extent to which partnerships are made with others (civil society, the private sector, governmental and international organisations) that enhance the effectiveness and impact of interventions and encourage sustainability. Partnerships that build sustainability might include:

1. leveraging funds for continuation,
2. securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach,
3. building capacity of southern actors to deliver a service or to monitor service delivery.

Leveraging funds for continuation

VSO's 'Corporate Business Plan, April 2012 to March 2015' says that:

This year ahead, 2012/13 is one of the most challenging that VSO has had in its history. [...] In 2011, the renewal of the three year unrestricted grant from DFID, on which we are highly financially dependent, put some hugely challenging parameters around that strategy. A condition of the grant was that we reduce our dependency from 50% to 25% by the end of the three year period.⁵¹ [...] In order to respond to this, we therefore embarked on a mission of radical change [...] to radically increase and diversify our income beyond DFID.

Within VSO International, this has led to a much more prominent and strategic role for fundraising. VSO has expanded its fundraising team and is in the process of increasing the organisation's global investment in fundraising:

Additional investment in fundraising, in £000s

10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15
46	1,270	4,700	5,000	5,300

Moreover, VSO's fundraising leadership has utilised the visible need for non-DFID funding to change the organisation's *culture* vis-à-vis fundraising. People worry and talk about prospective funding gaps and perceive successful fundraising as an important and honourable achievement (which sounds reasonable but was not traditionally the case at VSO). Part of this new culture is formalised: fundraising has become part of the responsibilities of all senior staff members, it is discussed during job interviews, and the function features more prominently in job descriptions.

Job descriptions

- A 1030-word CD vacancy announcement of 2004 mentioned the word 'funding' once, mid-way a list of 37 'key responsibilities.'
- A 913-word CD vacancy announcement of 2012 mentioned the word 'funding' eight times, including in the 'role purpose.'

⁵¹ The actual commitment with DFID is for a reduction of VSO's SGA-related dependency from over 50% to below 40%. The figure quoted in the business plan is an aspirational target for internal purposes.

Fundraising is driven by VSO's funding strategy (the 'Global Funding Plan'), which aims to diversify income streams and reduce dependency on DFID, and focuses on:

- Broadening and growing the institutional funding donor base;
 - Growing unrestricted funds from Individual Giving (globally);
 - Opening up new geographic markets (with an initial focus on Ireland and plans for India and the US); and
 - Growing corporate partnerships, trusts, and foundations.
- In addition, the Global Funding Plan emphasises donor maintenance: "VSO has sometimes not managed existing contracts well" and it "is critical that VSO addresses this and ensures that funds are spent properly and on time."⁵²

This prioritisation of fundraising and grant management has not yet led to a substantial reduction in DFID dependency,⁵³ but this may come soon. For the first time, there is a pipeline of income and outstanding proposals (which is new to the organisation and in and by itself an illustration of the increased focus on fundraising) and there are some successes already, as the following two examples illustrate:

VSO's new focus on high net worth individuals

VSO started to fundraise systematically from high net worth individuals in 2008, and developed it into an annual income stream of some £600,000 (2011/12 figure). Critical to the success has been the *Million Hours Fund* initiative that targets people who are able to give at least £40,000 over two years. This gives VSO earmarked funding for national volunteering programmes, and enables VSO to plan beyond a single year funding horizon. The goal is twofold:

- To raise £1 million within two years of its launch in October 2011, which is equated to 'a million hours of national volunteering time.'
- To build the fundraising proposition for national volunteering, which represents a strategic shift in VSO's model of development.

The Million Hours Fund is on track. Since October 2011, it has raised £440,000, and £158,000 has already been allocated to projects in India and Mozambique, for which VSO plans to release 639,000 hours of volunteering over the next two years.

VSO's new focus on Individual Giving in Ireland

In April 2011 VSO Ireland received funding to set up a regular Individual Giving programme with the aim of recruiting some 35,000 donors via doorstep or 'house-to-house' recruitment in the course of five years.

18 months later (including two months of preparation time to set up a database, produce materials and set up direct debit processing) VSO has recruited over 10,000 monthly direct debit donors who had jointly transferred some €660k (£535k).

⁵² Global Funding Plan, page 8 and 9 respectively.

⁵³ VSO's previous PPA amounted to £89m over three years, which represented 56% of VSO International's total income of £157m (as per the VSO statutory accounts for 2009-10 and 10-11; note that this is different from the 48% that the PPA Report 2010 reports on page 5, as the PPA Report 2010 expresses the PPA grant as a percentage of global VSO figures that include the income of VSO's federation members). VSO expects this percentage to decrease to 42% in 2012-13 and 37% in 2013-14 (Strategic Grant Annual Review, cover page).

The VSO country offices have also entered their respective fundraising arenas. In most countries this is new, and it is not optional: a sustained reduction of unrestricted DFID funding would mean that their future partly depends on their ability to secure programme grants. The country offices have access to Regional Funding Advisors in both Africa and Asia (also new, and clearly valued for their speed and expertise) and given access to training and investment funds to boost their capacity and capability in this area. Although there have been notable successes already, the organisation is still struggling to secure in-country grants and it is currently costing the country's senior management a disproportionate amount of time: in Laos, *most* of the Country Representative's time is dedicated to fundraising, and some 50 per cent of the time of the Tanzanian programme staff goes to the same.

The in-country pipelines of proposals cause us to believe that the final SGA review will be able to confirm a significant increase in the number and size of in-country grants and, once a trickle of in-country funding has started flowing, a reduction of the country leadership's time investment required for fundraising. This final review should also look at the implications of VSO's upcoming dependency on restricted funding for its ability to maintain focused on country strategies, and to systematically meet donor expectations (and thus to actually *receive* the grants). The latter may be a tough challenge, as restricted funding sometimes requires the organisation to find very specific experts in sizeable numbers (e.g. '20 nurses for South Sudan' or 'agro-engineers for Tanzania') and this can be difficult.

Securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach

At district, provincial and country level in VSO's countries of operation, policy adoption of an intervention or approach does not just happen regularly: it is often ***the point*** of volunteer deployment. Universities adopt more interactive teaching practices (or indeed create entirely new fields of study, as happened in PNG, with physiotherapy in the past and now again with Early Childhood Development); VSO helps to improve school curricula (in many countries), strengthen health-related policies and practices (in Tanzania), develop strategic planning frameworks (in Cambodia, in the field of fisheries), and so forth. We have not seen evidence of verification exercises that confirmed that the impact of interventions endured beyond VSO's involvement, but anecdotal evidence suggests that, at least sometimes, they do (the physiotherapy department of the Goroka General Hospital still exists, for example.)

In the international development sector, the voice of VSO is occasionally heard (such as in the case of HIV in southern Africa) but much less loudly than it could be. A partial explanation is probably that VSO's policy advocacy has traditionally been largely responsive rather than pro-active, and lacked focus. This may change in the next few years, now that the organisation has opted to focus its policy advocacy work on Education, Post MDGs and Women Participation.

Building capacity of southern actors to deliver a service or to monitor service delivery

There is ample qualitative and anecdotal evidence that confirms that partners have benefited from VSO volunteers. As VSO's Annual Review reports, there are also self-assessment assessments that generally indicate substantial progress. Occasional external evaluations (such as the PPA report of 2010) regularly confirm capacity gains, but we have only seen evaluations that are conducted during or immediately after a VSO contribution, which means that we have no means of knowing if capacity gains are sustained over time.

Self-assessments

VSO's partner self-assessments are carefully developed and very useful. They serve as the basis of conversations on baselines and progress, may help to identify areas in which support would be particularly useful and play a role as warning indicators. They are much less useful as indicators of actual progress because:

1. Both the baseline and the milestone measurements face a very strong risk of social desirability biases that lead to an unjustified score increase (in the words of one sector advisor: 'No one would want to look bad, to keep the partnership'). There is also a risk of scores that *decreases* from the baseline because of the partners' fuller realisation of the complexity of issues (which means that a lower score may indicate progress rather than regress).
2. There is a risk of leading facilitation (typically covered by somebody with an interest in the programme) and of data manipulation (as the data are processed internally, by the people who were directly involved in the programme.)
3. The scales used in the self-assessments are quality scales, and cover a partner's performance rather than VSO's role in building it.⁵⁴ There are many other variables that complicate attribution, as VSO often operates in a crowded space: organisations frequently have their own development plans too, and receive support, including external expertise, from several other organisations.
4. It is not feasible to use these scales to compare VSO-supported service delivery with the service delivery of a control service provider since VSO has no engagement or remit with the latter.

If the outcomes of quality scale scoring *is* used for the purpose of assessing programme impact, then at least:

1. The scoring should be the consequence of a negotiated process in which consensus is reached between a number of stakeholders. Such 'negotiations' are not always recorded, which means that the extent of participation of managers, staff and beneficiaries remains unclear.
2. Facilitation needs to be of a high standard and this is problematic if the facilitation of the discussion and the recording of outcomes are covered by the same person, which often seems to be the case.

The benefits that partners report often come in the form of technical support. Technical expertise is the core asset of most VSO volunteers, and this expertise can be applied across a very wide range of fields and in a number of ways. This technical support may help the organisation for the duration of the deployment (as appears to be the case with VSO's town planner, in Madang in PNG) or create permanent capacity in:

⁵⁴ An example from the *VSO Standardised Scale: Quality for Health Services, Education and Training*:

Sub-Area	Quality Level 1	Quality Level 2	Quality Level 3	Quality Level 4
Basic Training & Competence	Staff have only minimal theoretical training to perform their jobs and no practical training experience.	Staff have most of the theoretical training required and have some practical training to partially perform their duties.	Most staff are very competent in their area of work. They have all the theoretical and practical training required. A few staff lack the skills and knowledge to carry out their job to the right standard.	Staff are very competent and have all the theoretical and practical training required to successfully perform their duties. Skills are regularly updated.
Diagnosis & Treatment	Diagnosis may be quick and based on too many assumptions. Clinical protocols do not exist. Treatment options are limited.	Diagnosis is fairly thorough but focused primarily on routine conditions. Treatment options are a bit limited. Clinical protocols exist for only some conditions.	Most patients receive thorough and accurate examination and diagnosis with occasional gaps. Treatment is limited but generally appropriate. Clinical protocols are available for most conditions.	Staff undertake proper and thorough examination, providing accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment for all patients. Clinical protocols are fully used.

- Individuals - a number of senior people in Laos say to have benefited from CUSO support, earlier on in their career;
- partner organisations - VSO's work with the education authorities in Bukoba, Tanzania, seems to have changed the way the authorities think and operate; and
- beyond - VSO's work with the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association may prove to have sustainably improved the position of teachers in Cambodia.

In addition to utilising and gaining technical expertise:

- Many counterparts acquire ICT and English language skills in the course of a placement;
- Many volunteers provide support in the form of proposal writing;
- Many volunteer introduce general 'professionalism' (e.g. switching phones off during meetings, following track changes when editing);⁵⁵ and, last but by no means least
- The presence of international volunteers in partner organisations causes interaction across cultures and, in VSO's words, such interaction "inspires people, and [...] often regardless of the technical skills, VSO volunteers from different parts of the world act as a catalyst for change."⁵⁶

To ensure that the deployed volunteers are consistently appropriate, and are utilised to the full, VSO's partners need to be selected carefully, and partnerships need to be managed and fostered. The various parts of partnership management are outlined in 'The Path of Partnership' but are not consistently adhered to by country offices. Specifically:

- **Partner selection.** The second step in VSO's 8-step Value Chain is the 'identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies.' The Path of Partnership document stipulates that "We regularly update a list of all organisations that work in the sector and geographical area of our PAP [Programme Area Plan], and we develop an understanding of which organisations have the potential to have the greatest impact for the beneficiaries specified in the PAP" (page 5). We have seen very limited evidence of thorough stakeholder mapping.⁵⁷ We have not seen detailed lists of organisations, little comparison among possible partners,⁵⁸ and it is not always clear on what basis partners have and have not been selected.
- **Partner assessment.** In February 2011, Alfred Kumah, Nicola Chevis and Rebecca Sinclair launched a PowerPoint presentation titled "VSO's Systematic and Holistic approach to Capacity Development." This presentation gives a very concise-yet-powerful overview of the dimensions to consider when (self-)assessing a partner's 'capacity.' The 'Path of Partnership' refers to an earlier version of this same presentation, and to an accompanying CD that we have not seen. We have not seen evidence of this tool being used. Tanzania developed a separate tool (the 'Building Concept for Capacity Development', or BCCD, mentioned before) and other offices seem not to use any capacity assessment tool at all. One alternative is a discussion with the partner on possible support that VSO could usefully provide (possibly coloured by the particular interests and expertise of the VSO programme manager). This way of approaching partnership support helps to ensure that the support is welcomed, but means that VSO relies on the partner to find its capacity shortfalls and assumes that the partner's agenda is to support the poorest and most marginalised communities. Another alternative is to use research to direct work. To give just one example: we understood that much of the work with a disability organisation in PNG (Calan) is

⁵⁵ None of this is ever the focus for a placement but is often part of a broader training/capacity building programme. For volunteers these areas often represent quick wins in terms of relationship building.

⁵⁶ From *IPR Feedback 1*, page 11.

⁵⁷ There are exceptions. For example: a mapping of organisations working in Zanzibar led to a refocus from Unja (where there are many actors) to Pemba (where there are fewer actors).

⁵⁸ A notable exception: in PNG, VSO's health programme compared 12 Provincial Aids Councils on the basis of a range of dimensions, and selected the five councils that this exercise identified as the most promising.

based on research done, at village level, on the prevalence of, services available for, and perceptions related to various types of disability.⁵⁹

- **Partner plans.** Partnership Agreements are not consistently signed (and are sometimes focused on placements and job descriptions rather than partnership objectives – though this is now changing in the more advanced countries such as Tanzania).
- **Partner placements.** Terms of Reference are sometimes very different from the reality-upon-arrival. Volunteers are often used to find capacity gaps and identify opportunities that they could utilise (which are sometimes far removed from their primary fields of expertise – language and ICT support are frequently mentioned). This is not what VSO’s partnership model suggests, and is not altogether appropriate as, as a volunteer mentioned: “What hangs it together is the project management; we, the volunteers, we are not development professionals – we’re technical specialists.” Monitoring reports do not always exist, and where they do exist the partner has not always filled out its part. Early returns, late or no placements and placements that are shorter than requested occur regularly⁶⁰ and burden the partnerships. In the case of Ghana, basic information about who the partners *are* was outdated and incorrect. Notwithstanding these many imperfections, partners tend to be fairly or even very positive about the placements. In several interviews we asked about a partner’s preference if the choice was given between a volunteer placement and a grant of £20,000,⁶¹ and several partners opted for the volunteer.⁶²
- **Partner graduation.** Step 3 of VSO’s Value Chain covers the “development of individual partnership plans,” which includes the “development of sustainability plans to inform exit strategies.” We have not seen evidence of systematic thinking about exiting, except in Namibia, after VSO International informed that country office that it was to be closed.⁶³ In other countries, partnerships are sometimes ended, either because the partner ‘graduated’ or because the partnership is not to the satisfaction of VSO and/or the partner, but there are also partnerships that continue for many years, without conversations around graduation. None of the partners in any of the countries we visited referred to an exit plan when we asked an open question about ‘future plans with VSO,’ and a number of partners expressed the hope and expectation that the partnership with VSO was permanent.

We conclude that this is a key area for improvement.

Recommendation 4

The chances of partnership success, and the extent of such success, would increase if country offices more consistently adhered to VSO guidance on the identification of partners and the management and M&E of partnerships.

⁵⁹ Thornton, P and Pirpir, L (2008) *Discovering Disability in PNG; prevalence, perceived causes, service use and unmet needs*, Calan Services, Indara, India.

⁶⁰ VSO’s global early return rates are 20%. Our own verification calculation suggested a significantly higher percentage (43% in PNG, compared to VSO’s calculation of 28%). VSO estimates its failures to recruit at 20%, but we have not seen the underpinning evidence for this statement.

⁶¹ Which is less than the combined direct and indirect cost of an international placement.

⁶² “We’ll take Richard! He is value for money!” (Deputy Director General, Department of Fisheries Association, Cambodia.)

⁶³ The exit strategy included (and was informed by) discussions with employers and volunteers, capacity assessments to determine where VSO could best address outstanding gaps, short term volunteers and volunteer extensions to consolidate gains, links to other organisations, potential donors and other volunteer sending agencies. To the extent possible, the closure has been planned and implemented with care, though it was not perfect, as is illustrated by UNICEF’s surprise in learning, through our visit, that VSO was still in country (as they had noted “a rather abrupt end to the programme” and were under the impression that VSO departed Namibia in March 2012.)

3.3.4 Sustainability

Coffey on sustainability

Coffey asks evaluators to test the “sustainability hypothesis”, which is that “direct service delivery is localised and unsustainable, whereas civil society holding government to account leads to broader and more sustainable results.”

Working with partners that represent the right holders

In a number of countries, VSO contributes to the voice of the right holders and this has:

- **Efforts that have potential and results that we are already able to confirm.** In PNG, the health programme intends to support small associations of PLWHA, partly to develop their capacity as service deliverers and partly to strengthen the voice of PLWHA. The Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA) successfully lobbied for a 20% increase in pay for teacher salaries (and “these were all Jon’s ideas”).⁶⁴
- **Results that we found to be exaggerated.** We mentioned the lobbying in relation to Tanzania’s small farmers before, which was meaningful but minor in terms of VSO’s contribution. Another example is that “ASMADE and VSO held a conference (247 delegates attended) with the purpose of discussing the benefits of health mutual [insurance schemes] and to advocate to Government for widening its reach in Burkina Faso” (Annual Review, page 6). This conference was the initiative of the World Bank and its (non-VSO) partners. We found no evidence of VSO contributing to this conference. The only indirect link is that ASMADE gave a presentation and is a VSO partner.⁶⁵ In other cases it seems possible that VSO plays a very meaningful role but places itself in the shadow so as to allow its partners to shine.⁶⁶ This might have been the case with advocacy work in relation to OVC access to education which the Annual Review reported on (page 19) but for which we were unable to identify the role that VSO may have played.⁶⁷

Working with duty bearers

In many countries, VSO focuses on the capacity of the duty bearers, and we give examples of such endeavours throughout this report. For VSO to work within a rights-based approach, its duty-bearing partners ideally:

- Work towards a rights-based agenda (X wants to fulfil its duties in relation to A)
- Identify their own capacity gaps and ask for VSO support (X asks Y to address Z)
- Provide an environment that is enabling (X allows Y to address Z), empowering (X enables Y to address Z), receptive (X listens to Y’s advice on Z) and responsive (X utilises and builds on Y’s work on Z).

⁶⁴ Rong Chuum, Director of CITA. Jon is the VSO volunteer who led the design of the advocacy campaign.

⁶⁵ It is possible that ASMADE’s contribution has partly been inspired by its partnership with VSO.

⁶⁶ This is what we understand VSO has traditionally done. Now that the organisation is under pressure to compete for limited donor funding, VSO needs to discard this noble stance on who-gets-the-credit.

⁶⁷ Instead we saw evidence of UNICEF and SightSavers being the pivotal international agencies. The core of this work was that “VSO partners in Malawi held government to account through advocacy forums which resulted in more money being given to school bursaries budget to allow OVC to attend classes.” This may eventually happen but for the time being tapping into any governmental budget lines allocating grants for OVC school bursaries is at a very early exploratory stage, and we have found no evidence of any allocation of government funds to this initiative over and beyond the allocation that came from institutional donors’ contributions.

We have seen partners in Cambodia that befit this description from beginning to end. In other countries, we have seen one or more positive and negative examples of each of the dimensions.

Seeking to strengthen capacity is not always a useful thing to do if the partners exhibit a very limited ability to change, and very limited interest in changing. Essentially: you need to want to change to stand a chance of changing, and this is not always the case.⁶⁸

Alternatives to working with the duty bearers

Wherever capacity-building work with duty bearers is unlikely to succeed, VSO has three options:

- Provide direct services (e.g. teaching, rather than developing teaching systems). We are not at all inclined to criticise this choice of activities. First, work would get very frustrating without the liberty to deviate from right-based interventions when such interventions do not work. Second, direct service delivery, *as part of a partnership*, may strengthen a bond and builds credibility ('she's a really good teacher!') which might enable VSO to return to capacity building when the opportunity presents itself (provided that VSO keeps this in mind and does not merely accept the role of service provider).
- Work with partners who are not the traditional duty-bearers. This makes sense in countries where the government's coverage of even the most basic of rights is very limited.
- Test things out. Innovation can change the role, perceptions and agenda of duty bearers, and may be replicated even in situations where the duty bearers did not initially show much interest or support. In the case of rice cultivation in the highlands of PNG, the authorities initially lacked interest (partly because of Australian research that had concluded that rice cultivation was impossible in this part of the country) but they became involved and supportive (with the provision of rice mills, for example) once the initiative proved to be successful.

In short: Coffey's sustainability hypothesis has value and should be kept in mind at all times – but in the case of VSO it would be frustrating and ineffective to work *only* in line with this hypothesis.

3.4 Efficiency and value for money assessment

Coffey on Value for Money

Whether the project or programme has achieved the best combination of economy ('doing things at the right price'), efficiency ('doing things the right way') and effectiveness ('doing the right things').

Following the guidance provided by Coffey, this section divides Value for Money into Economy, Effectiveness, and Efficiency. We note that VSO, like most PPA agencies, has struggled to interpret DFID's Value for Money requirements, and compliance to expectations would have been easier to achieve if this guidance had been provided at the outset.

3.4.1 Economy

Coffey on Economy

Relates to the amount of resources or inputs (usually measured in financial cost) which are required

⁶⁸ Sometimes it is *explicitly* not the case. The PNG Situational Analysis quotes a PNG Minister, who told a PNG-Australian Aid Review team: "We have far too many plans in PNG and too little effective implementation." (PNG Situational Analysis, page 36.)

to achieve a given output. Fewer – ‘cheaper’ – resources or inputs represents greater economy (i.e. spending less).

We have found excellent examples of economy, as the following text box illustrates.

Excellent economy

A colour-coded Gantt Chart shows how an ICT committee has prioritised VSO’s ICT-related work. In line with these priorities, the ICT function has selected Dell as the new brand and models for VSO’s ICT network. The choice was partly related to VSO’s possible move to new premises, which is likely to cause people to work from smaller and flexible work stations. These require small docking stations and good ‘drop down’ functionality, and in both dimensions Dell outperforms its competitors. The decision was made at the end of a four-step iterative process. The fifth step was a tendering process that followed VSO’s tendering guidelines.

Now, as before, the ICT function determines which PCs and laptops VSO staff members can get. If somebody wants to get a different brand or specifications then this is possible at own costs, and logging into the network is only possible through the Guest Account.

This is much more than simply following procurement guidelines. It follows the organisational priorities (as set by a diverse ICT committee), is mindful of the future and of broader organisational issues (the possible move to new premises) and accompanies the decision with a policy that combines flexibility with a refusal to succumb to individual lobbying (“Sure, you can have a Mac if you really need one, but you have to cover the costs yourself and log in through the guest account”).

In other cases, we saw less evidence of economic thinking. VSO’s printing needs, for example, do not achieve maximum economies of scale. Printing needs are not managed centrally, are not covered by a single supplier or by a group of ‘preferred suppliers,’ and are instead covered by different parts of the organisation, without central guidance or control.

We saw a similar mix in country offices. On the one hand, we saw many examples of economic behaviour (renegotiating accommodation fees, office-sharing, low-cost transport and sharing transport, partner contributions to placements). On the other hand, we also saw examples of the contrary (unnecessary travel, underutilised office space,⁶⁹ unnecessary electricity consumption, no partner contributions to placements). Sometimes procurement was not necessarily *uneconomic*, but it was not *verifiably* economic. This was particularly striking in PNG. This is a high-cost country,⁷⁰ yet the office did not have or know of the existence of VSO’s 2011 Overseas Procurement and Logistics Procedure, and did not follow basic good practice.⁷¹

3.4.2 Effectiveness

Coffey on Effectiveness

⁶⁹ This refers to PNG in particular. The explanation was that the lease contract did not allow for sub-letting. This is not a satisfactory response, as contracts can be renegotiated (or at least attempted to be renegotiated).

⁷⁰ Of all VSO country offices, PNG has the highest budget per volunteer (£103k), and Laos has the lowest budget per volunteer (£13k). This is a very rough measure as there are non-volunteering costs (PNG has its Tokaut programme, for example, which is not a volunteering programme)

⁷¹ Such as obtaining three quotes for major purchases (or an explanation why there could not be three quotes), composing a procurement committee for major decisions; documenting the rationale for procurement decisions, conducting formal reviews of major cost drivers such as accommodation options, or filing procurement-related documentation in a single and clearly identifiable location.

The extent to which objectives are met. The question that would need to be asked is: ‘how far have the project or programme’s outputs and impacts contributed to it achieving its objectives? An example would be: did the teacher placement programme improve the quality of the school curriculum or raise achievement?’

Programme effectiveness

Throughout this report we have provided examples of programmes that do and programmes that do not achieve the best possible results. Most of these examples are tentative, as they are based on anecdotal evidence rather than thorough assessments.⁷²

In many cases, reasons for success seem obvious, as does the potential to strengthen programmes in cases where the achievements were less profound than they might have been if there had been more thorough partnership identification and management; better utilisation of VSO’s powerful analytical and conceptual tools; exit strategies; and prioritisation of ends over means (i.e. an international volunteer is not the solution to every problem). Another root cause of failure is the calculated risk of working in the world’s poorest countries, in which corruption is often widespread and, even if it is not, “the weaker capacity is to start with, the harder it is to build.”⁷³

However, we also came across initiatives that seemed very useful indeed, were developed jointly with partners, and nonetheless failed to achieve what they set out to achieve.

A mystery failure

VSO’s Alex and the provincial education authorities of Madang took inspiration from a piece of research that compared exam scores across schools in Madang province – and added to it by assessing the scores of specific types of questions. This could help schools prepare better for the following year’s grade 8 exams. The research was ready in June, and needed to be sent to the schools, for them to consider implications for teaching focus. When we visited the education officer responsible, on September 19th, the research report had not yet been sent – and the exams are coming in November.

We struggled to find explanations for such failures. The volume of available evidence is insufficiently robust to assess what makes or breaks a well-conceived partnership, placement or initiative – but it might have to do with incentives. We tried to follow incentive-based logic, and came with explanations such as this one:

Incentives and effectiveness

VSO’s Deb and David set out to improve the educational system and mentality of the University of Goroka, but found little appetite for change.⁷⁴ Accepting this, they focused their attention on introducing students’ classroom observation, producing better textbook material, and direct teaching.

We have not been able to assess this at any level of depth, but it strikes us that the nature of the required buy-in, incentives and barriers may be useful as a success predictor. In this case (and we saw other cases that follow a very similar pattern):

- System change and changes in the university priorities may have long term benefits (mild

⁷² We acknowledge that it is not easy to assess the impact of VSO programmes. The organisation works through partners, which means that cost-benefit analyses, for example, are rarely possible without a range of ‘heroic assumptions.’

⁷³ This is known as Steedman’s ‘governance paradox’, and is quoted in the PNG Situational Analysis, page 37.

⁷⁴ ‘Did we impact on the university structure and mentality? No. Did we change the mind-set of teachers? No, or little.’

incentive) but require the senior leadership team’s active buy-in and lots of work (strong disincentive), and it is risky (second strong disincentive). This part of Deb and David’s work was not successful.

- School observation, as part of the teacher training curriculum, has an immediate benefit: it is good for the students (mild incentive). The first time might be difficult to arrange (no disincentive as the volunteers are arranging it all) but after this it gets much easier: the school is immediately next to the university, and observation does not cost any money (barely a disincentive). This part of Deb and David’s work was successful – the Department Head, volunteers and students were all confident that the system will continue.
- Developing a high-quality text book to strengthen the quality of a module serves the immediate interests of the students (first mild incentive). The development cost a lot of effort (no disincentive as the volunteers are arranging it all)⁷⁵ but once it exists it is easier to continue using it than it would be to return to the previous books (second mild incentive to continue after the volunteers’ departure).
- Taking over teaching duties is easy to arrange as there is a clear incentive (i.e. ‘if they do it I don’t have to do it’). The impact of the teaching (and, with this, role-modelling) may be significant⁷⁶ but it is time-bound which is why, in many countries, VSO has gradually moved out of direct teaching.

Recommendation 5
 It might be helpful to map a partner’s incentives and disincentives to different types of change, when drawing up plans. Even if VSO does this, there will be an element of unpredictability, and it is wise to allow volunteers considerable flexibility to deviate from these terms of reference.⁷⁷

Recommendation 6
 VSO would benefit from a much more thorough and consistent approach to M&E, and from introducing post-closure impact evaluations. In the next few years, VSO will not be able to evaluate all of its programmes. When planning M&E activities, it may be wise to prioritise:

1. VSO’s most impressive successes. These successes could be used to learn from and for the purpose of strengthening VSO’s policy contributions and marketing material.
2. ‘Mystery failures’ such as the one described above, to gain deeper understanding of the variables that make or break VSO’s programmes.

Wider organisational effectiveness

VSO recognises that the organisation is not as effective and efficient as it could be, and is midway through an ambitious and multidimensional change process to rectify this. This change process already achieved significant progress, and many other improvements are imminent. A few examples:

Field of change	Example of change, realised	Example of change, planned
A new and much-improved	The board composition moved	The Board of Trustees intends

⁷⁵ Not entirely without support from the teaching staff: they reviewed chapters.
⁷⁶ Strikingly, when reflecting on the impact of their modules, students did not focus on the module contents but on the delivery methods of Deb and David: ‘they call us by our names, instead of just pointing and saying you.’
⁷⁷ Provided that such deviations are discussed and documented, and not merely caused by every new volunteer having a new set of interests. Some interviewees had the impression that ‘there is not a strong VSO identity – it is just a set of individuals doing their thing.’ Others did not feel the same way, and our limited observations suggest a mixture of the two.

governance system.	from 50% representativeness (i.e. VSO members) to 100% based on skills and (also southern) perspectives.	to introduce a trustee self-appraisal process.
A new, less organically grown and more logical organisational structure.	VSO's policy division covered international volunteering. This has now moved to HROD.	An increasing number of positions will be stationed in country offices.
New, less organically grown and more efficient processes.	In March 2011 VSO moved from a paper-based and non-standardised appraisal process to a standardised 360° process that is facilitated by an online system called 'Perform.'	A new volunteer cycle will hopefully speed up recruitment and placement of volunteers, reduce the proportion of early returns, and increase volunteer and partner satisfaction.
New, more appropriate systems.	VSO's new finance system is more aligned with VSO's contemporary needs.	VSO's ICT systems will move from 3 rd party development work to cloud-based 'software-as-a-service.' ⁷⁸
New ambitions in a range of fields.	VSO is intensifying its fundraising work in London and in country offices alike, and has quickly become much more funding-focused than it has traditionally been.	VSO's policy advocacy work will gain in focus by prioritising work in relation to Education, Post MDGs and Women Participation.
Cost-cutting.	VSO has made a number of savings (e.g. VSO saved an annual £286k by changing its contract with Harbourne Hall from lease to usage-based.)	VSO will move to smaller and more affordable UK accommodation.

This change process causes some resentment ('I feel betrayed'), reservations ('but where are the results?!'), déjà vu's ('we have done this before'), and there are some delays in parts of the change process, compared to the original plans. VSO's December 2011 Staff Survey, which is overwhelmingly positive and often far exceeds the sector benchmarks,⁷⁹ shows a relatively minor loss in leadership trust (54% has 'confidence in VSO's Global Leadership Team,' against a sector benchmark of 58%).⁸⁰ The half-yearly 'You First Pulse' surveys show low scores on questions such as 'VSO responds quickly and effectively to change' (37% agree) but these scores are stable and this is positive as change perceptions often deteriorate over time.

⁷⁸ A choice made as a consequence of a pro bono Deloitte consultancy on the future of VSO's ICT.

⁷⁹ To give just a few of many examples: VSO exceeds the sector benchmark by at least 10% on 'proud to say I work for VSO,' 'work here makes me want to do the best work I can,' 'if asked, I would recommend VSO as a good place to work,' and 'people can communicate openly with each other here regardless of position.'

⁸⁰ VSO External Benchmark Report 2011, Staff Survey, page 3.

None of this is unexpected or a cause of grave concern. Nearly any change process has delays and causes day-to-day and month-to-month frustrations. This is unpleasant for the individuals involved but, at the scale that we have seen, not worrying from a bigger picture perspective. In the words of a VSO trustee: “This change process is needed and driven by the changing world and development sector *and* by the requirement to consider where funding will be coming from in the future. Yes, it is diverse and far-reaching, but there are some very good people working on each of the elements of the change programme, and this helps to ensure that these many changes are all connected and make sense. [...] The current change process is quite different from previous change processes, which might have been more like ‘reworking the deck chairs of the Titanic.’”⁸¹

The only cautiously critical observation we would like to make is there is not much ‘appreciative inquiry’ in this change process. As in: we have seen a lot more ‘this will change’ than ‘this is great and we will build on it.’

3.4.3 Efficiency

Coffey on Efficiency

The relationship between output, in terms of goods, services or other results, and the resources used to produce them. The question that would need to be asked is: ‘how economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs, outcomes and impacts? Could more effects have been obtained with the same budget? In other words ‘doing the right things at the right price’.

Organisational efficiency

At the start of this SGA period, DFID asked VSO to reduce its administrative costs by 30%. VSO accepted and reported, in its Annual Review, that:

During 2010/11, VSO completed an organisational wide review and saved £5m from our ongoing running costs and re- invested in strategic change. These savings came from a mixture of day-to-day housekeeping and a de-prioritisation and cessation of planned activity both in the UK and overseas. (Annual Review, page 8.)

Moreover, the March 2012 Global Business Plan reports that “We are on track in our strategic change programmes to save a further £7 million that will ultimately grow VSO overall and be spent on our programmes” (page 8).

The Annual Review’s £5m is not an actual annual figure but an estimate that covers 2011-12 and part of 2010-11. More definite figures were produced later and report a ‘Variance to the 10/11 budget’ of £2,2m⁸² and ‘total 11/12 savings’ of £4.0m. Verification of these figures was not straightforward but conversations and spread sheets that VSO kindly produced in order to aid our verification process were helpful and suggest that the calculations are as correct as they could be in a period in which VSO’s restructuring moved cost centres and in which VSO moved to a new finance

⁸¹ Note that this last observation is something that other people mentioned too. An alternative view, also expressed on several occasions, is that this does not do justice to previous leadership and that earlier change attempts were sometimes reversed, only to be re-initiated later. An example that is sometimes mentioned is the attempt, in the mid 00’s, to focus on development impact (in the form of Programme Planning Areas) which was discarded on account of it amounting to ‘working in silos’ (a statement for which we have seen no evidence). Now, the SGA negotiations are forcing VSO to refocus on reporting impact.

⁸² To assess the meaning of this figure, we have requested an overview of underspending in the years before 2010-11. We have not received these data.

system that uses budget headings that are different from the headings used previously. To place these figures in context, we note that:

- The 2011-12 benchmark has been the 2010-11 expenditures, which may underestimate the savings achieved as the quest to reduce overhead costs started midway 2010-11. The expenditures of 2009-10 would have provided a much better benchmark.
- Savings are considered to be the summation of cost items that were reduced (largely but not exclusively deliberately).⁸³ Cost increases of other cost items were not considered in this summation. This is not the best possible manner of calculating cost savings. In essence: if you consider an organisation's cost reductions without considering its cost increases then most organisations make considerable savings in most years, simply as a consequence of year-on-year variations in expenditures. It would have been better to report in four separate categories:
 1. Cost reductions;
 2. Cost increases that are unrelated to the change programme (and together these first two aggregates form the net savings);
 3. Temporary investments needed to aid the change process;
 4. Permanent investments that are a consequence of the change process.
- Almost half the 2011-12 savings (£2,232k, out of a total of £4,767k,⁸⁴ or 48%) were made by transferring fewer funds to VSO members, rather than all being due to VSO International operating more efficiently. Ideally, we would have liked to see a more thoroughly documented rationale for this decision, to establish that transferring savings to VSO members was the best rather than the easiest way to deal with a saving's imperative. We note that the origin of further savings is likely to be different in the coming period, when the UK and worldwide change processes are going to result in efficiency savings.
- 'Re-investment in strategic change' includes two very different types of figures: temporary costs that are related to the *implementation* of change (e.g. a temporary HR officer who supports the restructuring process) and permanent costs that are the *consequence* of change (e.g. permanent fundraising staff, meant to help achieve VSO's fundraising targets). It would be better to separate these two figures, as they have very different meanings.

Recommendation 7

- Savings are best measured as a summation of both cost reductions and all cost increases that are not related to the change process.
- When calculating change-related investments it is good practice to distinguish between investments that are related to the *implementation* of change (such as a temporary HR officer who supports the restructuring process) and investments that are the *consequence* of change (such as a larger fundraising team), because the former cost is temporary and the latter cost is permanent.

Ample anecdotal evidence suggests that VSO is not yet an efficient organisation but this is gradually changing as the change process has already managed to make considerable efficiency gains, and many more efficiency gains are in the pipeline.

⁸³ We were unable to assess the percentages of deliberate and accidental savings because the restructuring and new financial system makes detailed analysis nearly impossible.

⁸⁴ This latter figure is higher than the reported 2011-12 savings of £4.0m, because these savings do not seem to have considered a £703k investment in VSO Ireland's Individual Giving capacity, which was hidden in the overall reduction of transfers to partners. In other words: the support reduction to VSO members amounted to £2,232k instead of the £1.529k, if you isolate the Irish fundraising investment.

Programme efficiency

If a volunteering organisation's overhead costs are kept to a minimum, its countries of operation have been selected on the basis of costs and potential impact, and placements are carefully identified and managed, then volunteer placements can be a very efficient way to support a development-focused organisation or government body. In such cases, the partnership is very satisfying to both the partner ('Lis' presence is just so useful – we call her 'wonderwoman') and the volunteer ('I'm so glad I came out here; and yes I do believe I provided the best skills and capacity building that I could while I was here'). There is also something equitable about volunteering: 'I think we have so much more credibility because we only earn a bit more than our partners. It wouldn't be right if I earned thousands of dollars a month.'

Often, inefficiencies are inevitable when international volunteers are deployed to countries with a culture, and often a language, that is very different from the culture and language of the volunteers, and where some of the partners are more than a little challenging. Lis – the 'wonderwoman' of the previous paragraph – estimated that some 40 per cent of her time was lost because of inefficiencies. Because of such inefficiencies, the opportunity costs of a placement might exceed its benefits: Jose, a pro-active, creative and positive volunteer from the Philippines who works in a Lao farmer support centre, said that his previous work in extension centres that cover poor rural areas in the Philippines had 'of course' been much more productive than the work he is currently doing. This has implications for the deployment's value for money: a volunteer such as Jose is probably good value for money wherever he is and whatever he does, but he is not the *best possible* value for money in a partnership that does not utilise him to the full.

Sometimes the key inefficiency is that the traditional VSO *means* are restricting VSO's ability to achieve its *ends*. VSO sees itself as "a development organisation that fights poverty through volunteers"⁸⁵ and sometimes seems to prioritise its means (volunteers) over its ends (fighting various dimensions of poverty). This is translated in numerical targets in relation to volunteer deployment,⁸⁶ which leads to pressure to find many partners to place many volunteers in, rather than pressure to make an impact.

Lao's young and fragile CSOs

CUSO-VSO had established a few micro-CSOs and supported these organisations (which have very few members of staff) with full time volunteer support. Years later, this volunteer support is still ongoing.

By now, these CSOs continue to need occasional support with English language proposals and reports, guidance as they enter new fields of work, and perhaps some help with marketing and networking. Beyond that, these CSOs do not need international volunteers but *money* to transit from small and fragile organisations to mid-sized and stable ones.

Recommendation 8

- The deployment of volunteers is not always the most appropriate and cost-effective type of support for VSO's partners. VSO has other means in stock – training and grants, for example -

⁸⁵ From "How we talk about VSO", page 1.

⁸⁶ The global targets have not been met in the past few years, and the number of volunteer placements is decreasing:

	31/03/2009	31/03/2010	31/03/2011	31/03/2012
Volunteers in Placement on 31 March	1638	1469	1409	1179

and would benefit from more systematically exploring them. Considering that volunteering is and will remain VSO's core business, the best possible support sometimes requires the involvement of other INGOs and stakeholders. Such possibilities could be explored more systematically, in cases where a partner might not be best served through volunteering.

- Numerical targets in relation to volunteer deployment may not be appropriate targets, as they lead to pressure to find many partners to place many volunteers in, rather than pressure to make an impact.

3.5 Impact and value for money of SGA funding

In this first half of the SGA period, SGA funding has amounted to more than 50% of VSO's total funding. This heavy dependence is not new: the previous PPA period provided VSO with £89 million over three years.

The implication of the SGA prominence is that it is not possible to separate impact and value for money of the SGA grant from the impact and value for money of VSO in its entirety. Put bluntly: without SGA, VSO would not have survived without dramatically downscaling its operations.

It is not possible to compare VSO's overall impact and value for money with the impact and value for money of other organisations, because the organisation does not have a strong tradition of assessing the impact of its work. However, the evidence presented throughout this report suggests that it is possible to strengthen VSO's impact and value for money very considerably. Specifically:

- More explicit and consistent focus on innovation is likely to increase the impact of volunteers.
- The chances of partnership success, and the extent of such success, would increase if country offices more consistently adhere to VSO guidance on the identification of partners and the management of partnerships. The introduction of multi-year partner-specific learning logs could help to ensure that the quality of partnerships progresses over time.
- Means should not overshadow ends. The deployment of volunteers is not always the most appropriate and cost-effective type of support for VSO's partners. VSO has other means in stock and would benefit from more systematically exploring them. Considering that volunteering is and will remain VSO's core business, the best possible support sometimes requires the involvement of other support organisations. Such possibilities could be explored more systematically in cases where a partner might not be best served through volunteering.
- VSO's performance in the fields of economy, effectiveness and efficiency is inconsistent, and not systematically monitored and documented. VSO's change programme is strengthening each of these three areas, and the SGA final review is likely to find significant improvements in the organisation's Value for Money performance, and in its capacity to *demonstrate* this strengthened performance.

4 Conclusions

4.1 Summary of achievements against evaluation criteria

This section follows the structure and colour coding principles of Appendix 5.2 of the Coffey Evaluation Strategy, with purple, green, amber and red representing an 'outstanding', 'high', 'medium' and 'poor' performing organisation.

The previous sections and, with much more detail, the country programme reports of Appendix G provide evidence of the statements made in this section.

Criteria and sub-criteria	Category of performance (quoted and colour-coded as per Coffey's guidelines)	Explanation
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The organisation provides evidence that the decision making process around intervention planning and design considers whether the interventions strike a balance between maximising impact and addressing the needs of the most poor and marginalised The organisation can show evidence of how they have tested the underlying rationale behind interventions. However, no evidence is provided to demonstrate that the results have any impact on intervention management 	<p>Several country offices consider the trade-off between maximum impact and reaching the poorest and most marginalised communities. In addition, we have seen a few examples of VSO testing the underlying rationale behind interventions.</p> <p>To progress to a green rating, VSO would have to show “evidence of continuously re-evaluating their interventions, and making appropriate changes, to ensure that they respond to the needs of the target population.” This requires more consistently thorough regional and sectoral assessments and choices, as well as regular stakeholder mapping to identify the most appropriate partners.</p>
Distinctive offering	The organisation can describe a distinctive offering, but does not demonstrate how this benefits DFID or the sector more broadly	<p>VSO’s offering is clear and distinctive, but the organisation does not have a strong tradition of assessing its impact, which is necessary to credibly and verifiably “demonstrate how ifs offering benefits DFID and the sector.”</p> <p>Assessing the organisation’s impact more systematically would enable VSO to progress to a green rating, which requires that VSO “[...] demonstrates how this has added value to the sector or industry as a whole.”</p>
Learning to improve organisational capacity	The organisation provides some evidence that it has used learning to improve key competences, and can show evidence of how this has become integrated into its interventions and organizational practice	<p>We saw evidence of learning that had informed VSO’s tools and practice. Moreover, the organisation’s current change process is underpinned by rapid learning from VSO’s past, learning about sector-wide good practice, learning from pro bono corporate advice, learning by reflection and logical thinking, and learning-while-doing.</p> <p>Progressing to a green rating is partly a matter of ensuring that the change process is implemented as planned, and partly a matter of more consistently applying VSO’s many useful programme tools. This would enable the organisation to provide “evidence that it has used learning to improve key competences which have become integrated into its interventions and organizational practice, leading to increased organisational effectiveness with demonstrable results.”</p>

Criteria and sub-criteria	Category of performance (quoted and colour-coded as per Coffey's guidelines)	Explanation
Learning to improve contextual knowledge	<p>The organisation shows some impact of learning about the context and/or learning during the course of the intervention[s] on the design and targeting of its interventions</p>	<p>In the course of their placements, volunteers get to know the context in which they operate and this often causes them to deviate significantly from their original Terms of Reference. This learning is shared with VSO country teams, which sometimes utilise this contextual knowledge to intensify, change or exit from partnerships.</p> <p>To progress to a green rating, VSO must demonstrate that “the design and targeting of its interventions derive from systematic learning about the context.” This includes longer term learning about partners (i.e. ‘what have we learned from the past 50 years of partnering with the educational authorities in a range of countries?’), of which we have seen no evidence.</p>
Learning to share with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides examples of learning generated from its interventions which have been generalized from the intervention context for the benefit of the sector/industry more generally • The organisation describes a clear or improving strategy for communicating the learning 	<p>In its countries of operation, there are many examples where VSO shared learning that was subsequently replicated or even generalised. Internationally, VSO underutilises the expertise of both its staff and its volunteers, and the organisation could have a much stronger voice in the international development discourse.</p> <p>VSO’s recent plans and proposals in relation to its ‘Global Advocacy Priorities’ promise much more focus in the sharing of learning, and this may facilitate VSO’s progress to a green rating, which requires that VSO “can show clear and verifiable examples of how learning generated from its interventions has significantly improved results and has been used by others in the sector/industry.”</p>
Incremental innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides evidence of the development and testing of existing knowledge to new contexts that has led to a demonstrable and significant improvement in their interventions or organisational capacity • The organisation provides evidence of the extent to which it has been taken up by others 	<p>We have come across several examples of international good practice being adopted in and adapted to new environments. We note that the evidence that VSO provides is often insufficiently rigorous, and it remains unclear to what extent new practice stays with partner organisations after these organisations ‘graduate’ from VSO partnership.</p>
Radical innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides evidence of the development and testing of new knowledge that has led to a demonstrable improvement in their 	<p>We have seen examples that, at least within a country (rather than worldwide) count as radical innovation, and that appear to have had a demonstrable (which is different from actually robustly demonstrated) and significant impact. Examples of this are mentioned in other parts of this</p>

Criteria and sub-criteria	Category of performance (quoted and colour-coded as per Coffey’s guidelines)	Explanation
	<p>interventions or organisational capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation provides evidence of the extent to which the new knowledge has been taken up by others • To count as outstanding, the use of learning will need to be not only demonstrable but significant. 	<p>report – and the clearest ones are related to rice cultivation in the highlands of PNG and to neonatal care in Tanzania.</p>
Partnership approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation has developed its partnership approach or can show it is following an existing partnership approach to high standards. • The organisation is able to show how its partnership approach improves sustainability and/or enables mutual accountability between partners 	<p>Amber is not an entirely appropriate scoring as VSO is unable to “show it is following an existing partnership approach to high standards.” However, red would be more inappropriate as it would mean that VSO “can show little or no evidence of an explicit partnership approach,” which is incorrect.</p> <p>VSO’s partnership approach is sound on paper and if this paper guidance is more consistently adhered to, the organisation may progress to a more fully deserved amber, or a green rating that requires VSO to provide evidence of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “a well-developed [...] partnership approach with verifiable benefits for results and sustainability • [...] evidence of mutual accountability within the partnership.” <p>As VSO always works through partnerships, we recommend prioritising that strengthening of its partnership approach, for which there is very considerable scope.</p>
M&E and impact assessment	<p>The organisation is unable to demonstrate that it has an effective M&E of impact assessment system or framework that enables it to capture, analyse, use and share information on changes (outcome and impact) or lessons learned</p>	<p>An organisation with as much unrestricted funding as VSO is in an ideal position to invest in an M&E system that is rigorous and consistently applied, and that includes post-closure evaluations that assess the long term impact of VSO’s contributions. Currently, VSO has no such system.</p> <p>Investments in VSO’s M&E work could strengthen the data that underpin VSO’s logframe and other progress monitoring instruments; aid learning about the approaches that work best and the types of partnership that are most beneficial to the poorest and most marginalised communities; and provide VSO with credible success stories that could help the organisation with achieving its funding targets.</p> <p>VSO may soon move to an amber and a green rating: one of the four foci of VSO’s Policy and Advocacy</p>

Criteria and sub-criteria	Category of performance (quoted and colour-coded as per Coffey’s guidelines)	Explanation
		function is to “strengthen monitoring and evaluation capacity across the organisation” (and we assume this does not merely mean creating new M&E positions but strengthening the organisation’s M&E <i>systems</i> and overall <i>approach</i> .)
Cost effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation is able to demonstrate a comprehensive and granular understanding of its costs and cost drivers • The organisation is able to demonstrate good understanding of its costs and able to make efficiencies as a result <p>But:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The organisation is not able to provide comprehensive and robust quantitative and qualitative evidence of its cost effectiveness 	<p>VSO meets Coffey’s first two amber criteria, as is illustrated by VSO’s change programme which is making efficiencies on the basis of an understanding about the organisation’s costs (but note our observations under the heading titled ‘organisational efficiency’, in section 3.4.3).</p> <p>We have not seen evidence of VSO meeting the third amber criterion, which is the ability “to provide comprehensive and robust quantitative and qualitative evidence of its cost effectiveness.”</p>
Performance against the logframe	Coffey does not define this and instead writes that “Scoring against this criterion will be clarified when further details of the new Annual Review Process are announced by DFID.” (Coffey Evaluation Strategy, Appendix 5.2, page 18.) We have not seen this clarification.	The data underpinning the logframe are not consistently and verifiably sound, and there is strong evidence that some of the data are incorrect. This means that the logframe baseline and milestone indicators cannot serve as consistently meaningful reference points.
Improving lives	The organisation is able to show some verifiable examples of how the lives of the poor and marginalised have been directly or indirectly improved	There are assessments that give an indication of success during and immediately after interventions, but we have not come across evidence of VSO gathering “robust evidence of how its interventions have directly or indirectly resulted in <i>long-term and sustainable changes</i> in the lives of the poor and marginalised” [our emphasis].
Changes in civil society	The organisation is able to show some verifiable examples of how its interventions have directly or indirectly resulted in sustainable changes to civil society (i.e. people doing things for themselves, civil society holding government	We have seen one example of a VSO intervention that helped a rights holders’ representative (the Cambodian Independent Teachers Association) to make a hopefully sustainable change in the form of a 20% increase in pay for teacher salaries. We have seen several examples where VSO exaggerated its impact (in relation to its contribution to a lobbying initiative that aimed to benefit Tanzania’s small farmers, for example); and several further examples

Criteria and sub-criteria	Category of performance (quoted and colour-coded as per Coffey's guidelines)	Explanation
	to account) and can clearly demonstrate how this will improve the lives of the poor and marginalised.	where VSO has not thoroughly assessed the impact of its work. Progressing to a green rating may merely require assessing and <i>documenting the results</i> of VSO's work, rather than <i>changing the nature</i> of VSO's work.

4.2 Summary of achievements against rationale for SGA funding

From the PPA guidance notes

- Summary of the attributable impact of DFID funding
- Narrative on the validity of the assumptions underpinning the rationale behind how the organisation uses PPA funding

Summary of the attributable impact of DFID funding

The attributable impact of DFID funding is that VSO is still operating at the level of the past few years. Without DFID funding, the organisation would have been struggling to survive, and survival would not have been in its current shape or size.

Other than enabling VSO to survive, the attributable impact of DFID funding cannot be separated from the impact of VSO in its entirety, because *most* of VSO's funding is DFID funding (only part of which is SGA funding), as per the table below.

VSO income, in £1000s

	2010-11	2011-12 (unaudited)	2012-13 (budget)	2013-14 (budget)
Annual income	54,675	55,980	62,000	67,000
SGA funding	28,550	30,000	26,000	22,000
Other DFID funding	3,518	5,592	15,000	21,000
DFID funding as percentage of total funding	59%	64%	66%	64%
SGA funding as percentage of total funding (which is the part that VSO is committed to reducing to below 40%)	52%	54%	42%	33%⁸⁷

⁸⁷ In the table on the cover page of the SGA Annual Review, VSO provides slightly different percentages of the SGA reliance in 2011-12 and 2013-14. The first difference is a consequence of our rounding up versus VSO's rounding down, and the second and larger difference is a consequence of a division error: £22m is 33% rather than 37% of £67m.

The validity of the assumptions underpinning the rationale behind how the organisation uses SGA funding

There is a strong logic to VSO's Value Chain and the organisation is likely to have a deep impact on the lives of the world's poorest and most marginalised communities if VSO follows the eight steps of this chain. It is a long chain and this lessens its strength: each step is crucial and if each step has a chance of success of 90% the chance that the chain does not break is 43% [i.e. $100*(0.9)^8$].

In this report we have covered the steps of this Value Chain and broadly concluded the following:

Steps of the Value Chain	Assessment
<p>1. Identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analysing global poverty trends Researching national poverty contexts Identifying where VSO can add the greatest development impact with best VFM. 	<p>VSO has recently conducted a worldwide review of its countries of operation. This review was based on a range of poverty- and fundability-related criteria,⁸⁸ and led to the decision to close a few VSO offices, and open an office in South Sudan.</p>
<p>2. Identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies, based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shared values and vision, including commitment to change Strategic ability to reach the most vulnerable groups Optimal range of partners at the macro and micro level for the greatest development impact. 	<p>This happens, but generally without thorough stakeholder mapping that ensures that the best possible partners are selected. The rationale for the selection of regions and sectors is sometimes evidence-based and documented, and sometimes less verifiably so.</p>
<p>3. Development of individual partnership plans which identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner capacities, priorities and skills gaps; Range of volunteering inputs needed, including number of volunteers, technical skills needed, type of volunteers (international volunteers, MP-scheme, diaspora volunteers, corporate sector volunteers etc), length of interventions needed. Appropriate knowledge sharing interventions (e.g. study tours, South-to-South expertise exchanges) Sustainability plan to inform exit strategy 	<p>This is a key area that VSO could strengthen. We have seen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Variable evidence in relation to the analysis of a partner's capacity, priorities and skill gaps. Some evidence to suggest that volunteer types and placement duration are sometimes determined by tradition rather than needs, and other evidence to suggest that this is changing in at least some of the VSO country offices; and Evidence of exit plans, but this evidence was limited to countries where the VSO offices are closing.
<p>4. VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rigorous selection process looks at skills-set and assesses motivation and attitude 	<p>The volunteers are generally positive-but-realistic and appropriately qualified for their placements' Terms of Reference. Pre-departure and in-country training is useful and generally</p>

⁸⁸ The only element that we saw no evidence of was the analysis of 'global poverty trends' [our emphasis].

Steps of the Value Chain	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-departure training delivered on development issues, cultural awareness, etc. • In-country training upon arrival delivered on national development issues and country strategy 	appreciated.
<p>5. Volunteers work with partners in country, with the following assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust and understanding of development needs is developed through integration in local communities • Placement objectives are reviewed with partner organisation • Placement objectives are delivered, including skills development through formal training for staff, on-the-job coaching and direct service delivery where applicable • Sustainable improvement in organisational effectiveness are supported, including strengthening systems and improving collaboration/accountability between partners, governments and communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently the process from recruitment to deployment takes an average of ten months. • We have not seen figures but understood from a longstanding staff member that the 'fill rate' went up from 60-70% in the 1990s to some 80% today. • 78% of the international volunteers complete their placement. • The level of integration in local communities varies. • The extent to which placement objectives are reviewed and achieved vary by country, programme and placement. • "Sustainable improvement in organisational effectiveness" is not always part of the placement.
<p>6. Partner organisations are strengthened sustainably. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased institutional capacity • Better technical knowledge • More engagement of national volunteers to strengthen community development • Strengthened relationship between government and civil society • Increased inclusion of vulnerable groups • Increased focus on gender equality 	For steps 6, 7 and 8: VSO does not consistently and thoroughly assess the impact of its interventions. During our country assessments, we saw evidence of some progress, some of the time.
<p>7. As a result: strengthened partner organisations. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver quality basic services • Provide more economic opportunities • Hold Governments to account/ respond to community needs • Meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups 	As above.
<p>8. Poor and marginalised people have improved lives. Specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved quality and access to basic services • Civil society better able to hold governments to account resulting in better development 	As above.

Steps of the Value Chain	Assessment
and implementation of pro-poor policies.	

4.3 Summary of problems and issues encountered

The two main issues we encountered are that:

1. The logframe does not serve as a benchmark document, partly because of weaknesses related to the logframe itself and partly because of the poor quality of the data that aggregated into the logframe's benchmarks and milestones. In many cases, this meant that judging the quality of interventions on the basis of the logframe requirements would be of limited use. Where this was the case, we looked at the process: 'why there, why that sector, why with them, what with them, why that with them, how that with them, how does it seem to be working out for the partner, and what does this mean for the ultimate target group?'⁸⁹
2. The SGA grant, and the PPA grant before it, are unrestricted grants, and VSO does not have a tradition of evaluating the impact of its programmes unless a donor requests it. The implication is that the impact of many PPA- and SGA-funded interventions are essentially unknown, and that much of this report is based either on anecdotal evidence (i.e. 'anecdotal evidence suggests ...', which is weak) or on the absence of evidence (i.e. 'we have not seen evidence of ...', which is a bit stronger as it will often mean that '... does not happen').

4.4 Overall impact and value for money of SGA funded activities

In the first half of the SGA period, SGA funding has amounted to more than 50% of VSO's total funding. This SGA dependency is not new: in previous years VSO was equally dependent on DFID's unrestricted funding (then called PPA), which provided VSO with £89 million over three years.

The implication of the SGA prominence is that it is not possible to separate impact and value for money of the SGA grant from the impact and value for money of VSO in its entirety. Put bluntly: without SGA, VSO would not have survived in its current form.

It is not possible to compare VSO's overall impact and value for money with the impact and value for money of other organisations, because the organisation does not have a strong tradition of assessing the impact of its work. However, anecdotal - but very consistent - evidence suggests that it is possible to strengthen VSO's impact and value for money very considerably.

5 Utility

For VSO

VSO is in the midst of an ambitious change process. The organisation's leadership may want to incorporate the recommendations made in this report into this change process.

For DFID

⁸⁹ This is essentially a tolerant version of the Value Chain (as in; the assessment covers the eight steps but without getting distracted by, say, the absence of an exit plan).

DFID could support VSO's follow up on the recommendations made this report by resisting the temptation to make demands that cannot be met. Specifically: VSO's reporting challenges cannot be resolved by further logframe revisions. Instead, VSO's focus should be on the development of its M&E systems. Such systems would enable the organisation to develop and populate meaningful logframes in the future. For the next Annual Review, it might be possible to benchmark against VSO's most robust *national* logframes, as an imperfect but realistic way forward.

6 Lessons learned

6.1 Policy level

VSO chooses to concentrate on the world's poorest countries and weakest states. With this choice, VSO takes a calculated but substantial risk, as this means that VSO will often work in environments that are challenging and with government authorities and organisations that are characterised by, among other things, endemic corruption,⁹⁰ hidden agendas and ambiguous or ineffective policies. Such environments require particularly careful selection and development of partnerships. Even where VSO has engaged in the best possible partnerships the work is subject to Steedman's 'governance paradox': "the weaker capacity is to start with, the harder it is to build." The implication is that placement failure rates can be reduced, but not eliminated.

6.2 Sector level

VSO works in education, health, disability, livelihoods and HIV/Aids-related services. These are crowded sectors, and VSO needs a niche. VSO's niche could be the innovative potential of 'volunteering.'

6.3 PPA/SGA fund level

There is tension between the requirements to innovate and the pressure to show prompt, impressive and consistent results. Reality is that innovative initiatives are risky and may either fail or take years of trial and error before reaching maximum impact. Judging innovative initiatives on the basis of their initial efficiency and effectiveness – as the IPR framework forces the assessors to do – risks killing innovation.

6.4 Organisational level

Although there are some examples of good practice, VSO could strengthen its economy, effectiveness and efficiency very considerably, and could assess and document its work a great deal better. The organisation acknowledges this and has initiated an ambitious change process to make this happen. Early results are already visible, and much more progress is in the pipeline.

IPR recommendations risk creating a new set of objectives and this could distract VSO's Global Leadership Team (GLT) from implementing the organisation's change process. This would be counterproductive. Instead, we hope that the GLT and DFID will jointly consider which of the recommendations can be incorporated into the current change plans. When considering the options, the GLT may keep in mind that the two most important areas of weaknesses that this assessment brought to the fore are:

⁹⁰ For obvious reasons, the risk of funds being diverted is much lower if support is provided in the form of volunteers rather than in the form of grant payments or in-kind donations.

1. VSO's lack of tradition of thorough impact assessments. This underpins VSO's weak logframe, poor long term learning, and untapped opportunities to provide evidence-based contributions to the international development sector's discourse.
2. Poor partnership identification and management. This explains much of the widespread underutilisation of volunteers, and all the associated challenges.

7 Recommendations

The logframe

1. The current logframe does not provide consistently meaningful information. This is partly because of the quality of the data that fed into this logframe, and can therefore not be fixed by producing a fifth version.
2. Instead of reworking the logframe once again, we recommend to focus on the underpinning problem, which is the way VSO gathers data. This is partly a mentality (you need to want to do it), partly a funding and work plan issue (M&E needs to have a place in budget and time frames) and partly a matter of protocol and the documentation of choices (both global and national).
3. Ideally, data are gathered on an ongoing basis, but data reporting is limited to fixed times of the year. Currently, country offices are struggling with the information they have to provide. This is partly because not all offices are used to grant management and the reporting that comes with this, and partly because VSO International's demand are more frequent and variable than would be ideal (the annual reports are due in February but the last major logframe exercise, for example, was in June).
4. Once the underpinning problems have been resolved, it would be wise to look at the logframe again. This is likely to take a few years, and the SGA final review may not have a new and improved worldwide logframe to compare results with.
5. VSO and DFID have to agree on an alternative before the final reviewers start their work. Two possibilities would be to:
 - Find the country offices with the most robust *national* logframes, and ask them to prepare for a contribution analysis. These national logframes and contribution analyses could jointly form the final review's reference points.
 - Make an inventory of all external evaluations that have been conducted in the past few years, and utilise them to inform VSO's next SGA Annual Review.

M&E

VSO would benefit from a much more thorough and consistent approach to M&E, and from introducing post-closure impact evaluations. In the next few years, VSO will not be able to evaluate all of its programmes. When planning M&E activities, it may be wise to prioritise:

1. VSO's most impressive successes. These successes could be used to learn from and for the purpose of strengthening VSO's policy contributions and marketing material.
2. 'Mystery failures' such as the one described above, to gain deeper understanding of the variables that make or break VSO's programmes.

Learning

The introduction of multi-year partner-specific learning logs could help to ensure that learning is not lost over long periods of time.

Partnerships

- Sometimes there is significant discrepancy between volunteers' Terms of Reference and the reality they find upon arrival. It might be possible to reduce this discrepancy by initiating a three-way engagement prior to the actual deployment.

- The chances of partnership success, and the extent of such success, would increase if country offices more consistently adhered to VSO guidance on the identification of partners and the management and M&E of partnerships.

Savings

- Savings are best measured as a summation of both cost reductions and all cost increases that are not related to the change process.
- When calculating change-related investments it is good practice to distinguish between investments that are related to the *implementation* of change (such as a temporary HR officer who supports the restructuring process) and investments that are the *consequence* of change (such as a larger fundraising team), because the former cost is temporary and the latter cost is permanent.

Means and ends

- The deployment of volunteers is not always the most appropriate and cost-effective type of support for VSO's partners. VSO has other means in stock – training and grants, for example - and would benefit from more systematically exploring them. Considering that volunteering is and will remain VSO's core business, the best possible support sometimes requires the involvement of other INGOs and stakeholders. Such possibilities could be explored more systematically, in cases where a partner might not be best served through volunteering.
- Numerical targets in relation to volunteer deployment may not be appropriate targets, as they lead to pressure to find many partners to place many volunteers in, rather than pressure to make an impact.

Annex A: SGA IPR terms of reference

TERMS OF REFERENCE
for the
INDEPENDENT PROGRESS REVIEW
of the
Strategic Grant Agreement between VSO International and DFID

1 INTRODUCTION

VSO is a leading international development agency working with volunteers to achieve development outcomes. Its distinctive approach to development focuses on building the capacity of local partner organisations and individuals in developing countries through strategically placed skilled professional volunteers. Through sustainable skills transfer and partnering, organisations and individuals are better able to access quality services and advocate for change at the grassroots level.

In the 2011-12 year VSO had partnered with over 1,000 organisations in 30 countries (including 20 fragile states) delivering in excess of 445,000 international volunteer days.

The UK Government, through the Department for International Development (DFID), has invested £78m over 3 years from April 2011 to March 2014, through a Strategic Grant Arrangement (SGA) with VSO. This equates to around 53% of overall VSO⁹¹ funding in 2011/12.

In order to maximise the returns for this investment VSO has undertaken a strategic review and implemented a change programme designed to improve the leverage and impact we can generate from DFID funding.

VSO is seeking the services of suitably qualified firm of consultants/evaluators to conduct a mid-term, Independent Progress Review (IPR) of our three-year Strategic Grant with DFID. Further details of the IPR and application procedure are outlined below.

2 EVALUATION OF THE STRATEGIC GRANT

VSO works to improve the lives of the poor and most marginalised people, by working with partners towards our four Dimensions of Change. VSO's dimensions of change are:

- Improve the quality of and access to basic services
- Inspire individuals to see how they can make a practical contribution to fighting global poverty and create opportunities to do so;

⁹¹ VSO – International Federation

- Strengthen Civil societies to give people a voice, choices and power over decisions that influence their lives
- Influence governments to develop and implement pro-poor policies.

Our dimensions of change are given effect through our core operating model that is set out below. Since 2011 VSO has undertaken a wide-ranging strategic review that has sought to strengthen the way that we work within this model in order to maximise the value that we can generate at each stage.

VSO's Value Chain

1. **VSO identifies global and geographical priorities and develops global and national strategies** by:

- Analysing global poverty trends
- Researching national poverty contexts
- Identifying where VSO can add the greatest development impact with best VFM.



2. **In line with the regional/country strategies VSO identifies key partners** based on:

- Shared values and vision, including commitment to change
- Strategic ability to reach the most vulnerable groups
- Optimal range of partners at the macro and micro level for the greatest development impact



3. **VSO and selected partners develop individual partnership plans** which identify:

- Partner capacities, priorities and skills gaps;
- Range of volunteering inputs needed, including number of volunteers, technical skills needed, type of volunteers and length of interventions needed.
- Appropriate knowledge sharing interventions
- Sustainability plan to inform exit strategy



4. **In line with the partnership plans, VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers:**

- Rigorous selection process looks at skills-set and assesses motivation and attitude
- Pre-departure training delivered on development issues, cultural awareness, etc.
- In-country training upon arrival delivered on national development issues and country strategy



5. **Volunteers work with partners in country :**

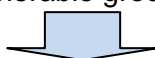
- Trust and understanding of development needs developed through integration in local communities
- Placement objectives reviewed with partner organisation
- Placement objectives delivered, including skills development through formal training for staff, on-the-job coaching and direct service delivery where applicable
- Sustainable improvement in organisational effectiveness supported, including strengthening systems and improving collaboration/accountability between partners, governments and communities



6. **Partner organisations are strengthened in a sustainable way** through:
- Increased institutional capacity
 - Better technical knowledge
 - More engagement of national volunteers to strengthen community development
 - Strengthened relationship between government and civil society
 - Increased inclusion of vulnerable groups
 - Increased focus on gender equality



7. **As a result, strengthened partner organisations are better** able to:
- Deliver quality basic services
 - Provide more economic opportunities
 - Hold Governments to account/ respond to community needs
 - Meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups



8. **Poor and marginalised people have improved lives** through:
- Improved quality and access to basic services
 - Individuals and groups having space for participation and decision-making;
 - Civil society better able to hold governments to account; and
 - Change in pro-poor policy or implementation of policy.

3 THE PURPOSE OF THE IPR EVALUATION

The IPR is an independent mid-grant evaluation to assess the performance of the DFID strategic grant provided to VSO. The purpose of the IPR is threefold, primarily to assess:

- a) The extent to which VSO is performing against the objectives⁹² identified in the Log-frame and the business case developed by DFID for the Strategic grant;
- b) The extent to which VSO's achievements align with DFID's theories of change;
- c) The impact of DFID's funding in terms of the additional benefits realised because of funding and its attributable contribution to organisational effectiveness and the results set out in the VSO log-frame. The impact assessment will consider the value for money VSO derived from DFID funding.

5. ASSESSMENT OF ANNUAL REVIEW ACTIONS

VSO will receive feedback from DFID and Coffey International Development on our first annual progress report at the end of June 2012, which we will be expected to act upon. The

⁹² Revised Logframe - January 2012

IPR will also provide an independent assessment on the extent to which VSO has acted upon this feedback.

5.1 Verification of VSO Reporting

VSO will be assessed by the DFID Evaluation Manager. The IPR will contribute to this assessment by:

- Verifying VSO reporting related to the assessment criteria.
- Providing an independent assessment of the organisation in relation to the assessment criteria.
- Providing recommendations on how VSO can improve its interventions and outcomes, in relation to the evaluation criteria, without compromising on cost-efficiency, quality and timeliness, and are implementable within the remaining 18 months of funding.

The IPR will conduct an assessment of VSOs SGA supported work against the criteria of **relevance, efficiency, effectiveness** and **results**, which are based on the standard OECD DAC criteria.

The following assessment questions represent an indicative list and are guidelines only. The Independent Evaluator, in consultation with VSO shall agree a final set of evaluation criteria for assessment.

Relevance

- To what extent do the interventions and outcomes (as expressed in the Log Frame) represent and respond to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and target populations?
- To what degree do the planned interventions and outcomes reach the poorest and most marginalised? To what degree have these interventions balanced achieving greatest impact whilst targeting the poorest and most marginalised?

Efficiency

- To what extent is VSO able to evidence its cost effectiveness and as such demonstrate an understanding of its costs, the factors that drive them, the linkages to their performance and an ability to achieve efficiency gains?

Effectiveness

- What are the distinctive offerings of VSO and how does it complement or add value to DFIDs portfolio?
- To what extent has VSO learned from its work and incorporated the lessons into improved performance?
- To what extent has VSO produced generalisable learning that has been incorporated into its own practice and shared with DFID and other actors in the humanitarian, NGO and academic sectors?

- What is VSOs monitoring, evaluation and learning capacity, and to what extent has it been able to measure results? (focusing on the quality of reported results and lessons learned)

Results

- Performance against the Log Frame: To what extent is VSO achieving (or progressing towards) the intended outcomes?
- Changes in lives. What changes are these outcomes making in people's lives (positive and/or negative) and how many people are affected?
- Changes in civil society. To what extent are citizens doing things for themselves? To what extent is civil society enabled to hold government to account?
- To what extent does DFID funding achieve additionality i.e. has enabled VSO to achieve things they would have otherwise not been able to achieve?

6 IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF DFID FUNDING

Impact Assessment of DFID Funding

The IPR will also **evaluate the impact** of DFID funding and assess the value for money derived from DFID's investment in VSO programmes. The IPR should result in a plausible account of the difference that DFID's funding has made to the effectiveness and performance of VSO throughout the value chain highlighted earlier.

The additionality of funding is of key importance for DFID as it is crucial to understanding the net impact of its interventions. The impact evaluation will therefore need to identify a robust counterfactual so that the additionality of DFID funding and VSOs interventions can be clearly established.

6.1 Impact assessment and economic evaluation

VSO works with 216 partners globally in delivering education services. In our latest 2011/12 Annual review our sample of 117 of these VSO partners reached over 3.8 million children. VSO has supported partners to address some of the barriers to children, particularly girls completing primary school specifically through school community engagement initiatives and working with parent teacher associations.

VSO Cambodia, for example contributed to improvements in education quality by facilitating skills training in child friendly teaching and better community and student engagement in schools.

At a national level we can see the primary completion rates increasing in Cambodia by 4.4% (female: 4.9%), the repetition rate decreased by 1.3% (female: 1.2%) and the drop-out rate decreased by 0.4% (EMIS 2011/12).

A plausible **assessment of the contribution** of VSO to higher level outcomes and impacts in quality education should be made. This can be done through a variety of approaches, including a through a theory of change based approach, verifying the plausibility of theories of change that underpin the delivery of results.

The evaluation will need to use both primary and secondary data, covering both qualitative and quantitative aspects. Mixed method approaches to evaluation are favoured, and the independent evaluator shall present a recommended combination of tools and methodologies to be applied in evaluating whether VSOs interventions in primary schooling have had a significant bearing on completion rates.

This will require some travel, including to country offices of some of the sample, participating country or countries (specific countries to be determined).

6.2 Economic evaluation of the impact

The original SGA business case developed with DFID identifies an economic estimation of net benefits derived from VSO interventions on primary schooling completion rates. That modelling provides a preliminary estimation of positive returns under certain assumptions.

The IPR should revisit the economic estimation of the value of benefits derived from improving primary completion rates in the original SGA business case and develop this model significantly by testing and refining the key assumptions on the basis of new data. The cost benefit analysis shall be updated accordingly and provide an estimation of economic value derived from VSOs intervention in improving the quality of primary education.

7 DELIVERABLES AND TIMEFRAME

- Submission of applications by **5pm 22 June 2012**
- Presentations from shortlisted applicants completed between **2-6 July 2012**
- VSO appoints successful tenderer by **10 July 2012**. The successful tenderer will should expect to start immediately
- Comprehensive Evaluation Design and Plan and Final Budget by **20 July 2012** – building from the proposal and finalised in consultation with VSO. This should include an evaluation framework, timelines and a breakdown of methodologies to be used. This plan will also specify which country or countries the team will visit.
- Presentation of preliminary findings **5 October** – an initial presentation of findings and recommendations will be given to VSO.
- Comprehensive Draft Evaluation Report **Friday 12 October** – a draft evaluation report will be submitted to VSO, who will review and provide feedback within one week (7 days) of receipt. The draft report should consist of the following:

- a. Executive summary
 - b. Purpose, objectives, criteria and scope
 - c. Methodologies and data collection
 - d. Progress, findings and results – structured according to the criteria above
 - e. Impact assessment
 - i. Findings
 - ii. How VSO generates additionality
 - iii. How VSO is delivering Value for Money
 - f. How VSOs work aligns with DFID's theory of change and business case
 - g. Conclusions, recommendations and lessons learnt
- Final Report noon **Friday 26 October** – the final report incorporating or addressing all feedback is submitted to VSO.

8 IPR CONSULTANT

We are seeking proposals from consultants, evaluators or firms that have the following skills and experience:

- At least 7 years' direct experience in designing and conducting evaluations for international development organisations;
- Strength in economic modelling and cost benefit analysis;
- Familiarity with evaluation methods for effective assessment of thematic sectors that VSO works across
- Understanding of evaluation methods for assessing impact of unrestricted funding and organisational change
- Knowledge of, and ideally experience with, DFID's priorities and approaches, including their agenda on Value for Money
- An understanding of some or all of the sectors included in the VSO log frame
- Excellent analytical and communication skills

9 QUALITY ASSURANCE

All applications must set out a robust process of quality assurance process, both through clearly defined internal processes and utilising an external peer review process. The external peer review panel shall be independent of the consultant and suitably qualified to the satisfaction of VSO.

The external peer review shall consider both the detailed design prior to implementation and at the stage of the draft report.

All key the limitations of the data and any conclusions drawn from it must be clearly stated by the consultant in their work.

10 APPLICATION PROCESS

Interested applicants should submit a bid to VSO through the e-mail address below.

Bids must include the following:

- A written proposal (Up to 10 pages) addressing this TOR, including an initial evaluation framework approach and proposed QA processes)
- Proposed budget, inclusive of fees and national expenses but exclusive of international travel costs.
- CVs of each team member, which should include evaluation experience
- Completed pre-tender questionnaire (supplied with these TOR)
- Name and e-mail or phone number of a contact person

Application shall be sent to the following email address: Andrew.Caffery@vso.org.uk with "IPR APPLICATION" in the subject field.

Complete bids will be considered according to the following criteria:

<u>Quality of the bid</u>	<u>75%</u>
Proposal description, approach and framework	45%
Project team experience and expertise	20%
Quality assurance process	10%
<u>Budget</u>	<u>25%</u>

We very much regret that, in view of the large number of expressions we receive, we are unable to respond if you are unsuccessful. Should you not hear from VSO within two weeks of the closing date, please assume that you have not been successful.

14. CLARIFICATION

Tenderers may submit questions related to this tender only in writing to the email address specified above. VSO may request further information from Tenderers after the submission of their proposals.

The onus is on the Tenderer to ensure that its offer is complete and meets VSOs requirements. Failure to comply may lead to the offer being rejected without any reason being given. Please therefore ensure that you read this document carefully and answer fully all questions asked.

Annex B: Evaluation research schedule and timescales

Action ⁹³	July		August					September				October			
	16-22	23-29	30-5	6-12	13-19	20-26	27-2	3-9	10-16	17-23	24-30	1-7	8-14	15-21	22-26
Inception meeting, briefing, and discussion about methods	X														
Review of VSO's Annual Assessment Process and other relevant M&E reports			X												
Drafting of inception report with detailed methodology and implementation plan	X														
Presentation to Steering Committee, and Steering Group provides feedback			X												
Processing of feedback and Steering Committee sign-off			X												
Assessing V4M, framed by the value chain assessment, London, part 1					X										
Refine field methods						X									
First stage field visits and drafting country reports								X				X			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisational capacity assessment, to complement the V4M assessment Assessment of VSO's follow up action in relation to DFID's comments 								X							
Second stage field visits and drafting country reports										X					
Presentation of preliminary findings													X		
Drafting report														X	
Submission and presenting of draft report; on the basis of an evidence-based discussion: reworking of draft report; submission of final version on October 22.															X
Weekly progress report to VSO															Ongoing

⁹³ This schedule reflects actual rather than planned work. Actual and planned work are identical, with the following exceptions:

- We submitted the Africa reports a few days later than scheduled, and the Asia reports a few days earlier than scheduled.
- We submitted the final report on October 22 (above) instead of on October 26 (as the inception report envisioned).

Annex C: Data collection tools

In our bid we had proposed a survey amongst partners and volunteers, but VSO felt that this would not be amongst the best possible tools for this assessment (and, in hindsight, we believe that VSO was right). Instead, we gathered our data in the course of unstructured and semi-structured interviews and FGDs, through the review of documents and through the analysis of data sheets such as beneficiary lists and lists of arriving and departing volunteers.

Annex D: List of people consulted

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Abecia, Nenetta Josenita	F	Cord (Civil Society Consortium Programme), Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Interview	02.10.2012
Addison, Jo	F	VSO International	Head of International Communications	Meeting	06.09.12
Adu, Ernestine and Monteverde, Marivic	F	Bongo District Assembly, Ghana	Local volunteer with women's basket making cooperative and VSO Business development volunteer	Discussion	13.09.2012
Ali, John	M	VSO Ghana	Finance and Programme Support Manager	Discussion and interrogation of figures	10.09.2012
Amphone	M	Vilabouly, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Apanga, Paul	M	Ghana Education Service Upper East, Ghana	Regional Director	Discussion	12.09.2012
Armba, Jack	M	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Standards Officer, Sinasina Yongumvgl. District	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Asomburah, Thomas; Adayelei; Johnson, Agolma; and members	5M/2F	Guinea Fowl Farmers Association, Ghana	Regional President; Project Officer for the Association; Bolga District representative, Secretary of Women's Wing and 3 members	Focus group discussion followed by visit to President's hatchery	13.09.2012
Atua, Henrica	F	Madang Primary School, PNG	Deputy Headteacher	Interview	24.09.2012
Awasthi, Sanjay	M	VSO Ghana	Country Director (08/12)	Working lunch & discussion	09 and 10.2012
Baldaro, Jason	M	VSO International	Contracts and Procurement Manager	Meeting	03.09.12
Bangal, Gemma	F	District Education Office, Angkor Chey district, Cambodia	Ex VSO volunteer	interview	10.10.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Barbara	F	Ghana National Education Coalition Campaign	VSO Volunteer	Discussion	14.09.2012
Bason, John	M	VSO International	VSO Trustee and Honorary Treasurer	Telephone conversation	09.09.12
Beelao	M	Nonghet, Xiengkhouang, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Boakye, Samuel and Bashurudeem, Yacouba	M	LINK Community Development, Ghana	Manager Bolgatanga; Project Coordinator TENI	Discussion	12.09.2012
Bora, Soeung	M	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Project Staff	Interview	08.10.12
Bouban	F	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Bounany, Vom	F	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Deputy Head of Division of Agricultural Promotion	Interview	28.09.2012
Bounlert	M	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Bouphasavanh, Inthana	F	Women Rights Study Association (WRSA), Laos	Director	Interview	01.10.2012
Bpanai	F	Pathology Laboratory of PAFO Champasak, Laos	Laboratory Officer	Joint interview (with her and her colleague Ms Seng)	29.09.2012
Bringans, Amanda	F	VSO International	Director of Global Funding and Brand	Meeting	04 and 12.09.12
Bulal, Bournlot (Dr)	M	PAFO Salavan, Laos	Deputy Head	Interview and travelling together	27.09.2012
Bungchang	M	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Formerly the Director of the PAFO, and the line manager of the volunteer.	Interview	28.09.2012
Caffery, Andrew	M	VSO International	Head of Impact and Accountability	Discussions	Throughout assignment
Chamungu, Joan and	F/M	TAF Tanzania AIDS Forum (suspended)	Acting Chair and Advocacy	Discussion	07.09.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Wandera, James		partner)	volunteer		
Chanda, Ken	M	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Aquaculture technician	Interview	08.10.12
Chanita, Krani	M	Preah Net Preah Referral Hospital, Cambodia	Director	Interview	09.10.12
Chansamone	F	Paek, Xiengkhouang, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Chanthalath, Khamla	F	CUSO-VSO, Laos	Finance and Programme Support Officer	Interview and debriefing	26.09.2012; 02.10.2012
Chatterjee, Somnath	M	Nongdeng Centre, Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Interview and joint village visit	27.09.2012
Chea, Vantha	M	VSO Cambodia	Country Director	Interview	04.10.12 05.10.12
Chhum, Rong	M	Cambodian Independent Teachers Association, CITA	President	Interview	05.10.12
Children aged between 10-12	M/F	Eng Veas Tany Primary School, Cambodia	Members of the Student Council	group discussion	10.10.12
Chisanga, Passwell	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion	19.09.2012
Christopoulos, Alex	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion	19.09.2012
Coghlan, Jo	F	AVI, Namibia	VSO Volunteer	Meeting	22.08.12
Conochie, Gordon	M	NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Cambodia	VSO Volunteer, strategic support to NEP Director	Interview	04.10.12
Cook, Tim	M	CUSO-VSO, Laos	Country Representative	Multiple conversations	26&30.09.2012; 02.10.2012
Cooper, Ros	F	DFID, Tanzania	Deputy Head	Interview	03.09.2012
Cotton, Kate	F	VSO International	National Volunteering Manager	Meeting	16.08.12
Coulter, Tom	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Conversation	20.09.2012
Cranston, Nora	F	VSO International	Assistant to Director of Policy, Global Leadership Team	Facilitation and information provision	Throughout the assignment
Custido, Athena	F	HJA, Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Interview and joint visit to	26.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
				trainee volunteers	
Danith, Chan	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	TWGF Coordinator	Interview	04.10.12
Dauids, Emily	F	AMICAALL Namibia	Admin Officer	Discussion	20.08.12
Digna, Sister; Menezes, Sister Cynthia; and Kariya, Sister Editha	F	Mugana Hospital, Tanzania	Hospital Administrator, Matron & Head of Nursing School.Nurse Tutor	Group Discussion	05.09.12
Duorinaah, Eric	M	VSO Ghana	TENI Programme Coordinator	Interview	10.09.2012
Endiken, Mary	F	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Standards Officer, Elementary Education	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Fabian, Gregory	M	Bukoba Rural District Office, Tanzania	District Education Officer	Discussion over dinner with volunteers present	04.09.2012
Facilitators of Girls Clubs & Gladys Seydou	2M/7F	Schools in Talensi, Ghana	3 from primary schools; 4 JHS; 1 from school for deaf children & Gladys Seydou member of DEO SMT	Focus group discussion	12.09.2012
Flux, Alan	M	Artisans Association, Cambodia	VSO Volunteer (for over 12 years), Cambodia (assignment completed)	Interview	05.10.12
Foster, Matt	M	VSO International	Director, Asia and Pacific and Senior Responsible Officer – Quality & Performance Change programme	Meeting	09.08.12
Fraser, Scott	M	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	VSO Volunteer for Capacity Building, Marketing, workshop – livelihoods training.	Interview	08.10.12
Froment, Eloise	F	Volunteer Bolga Regional Education Office, Ghana	Peripatetic INSET trainer - Science	Discussion	12.09.2012
Fuglesang, Dr. Minou	F	FEMINA, Tanzania	Executive Director	Discussion	07.09.12
Gallagher, Nick	M	VSO International	Head of International Volunteering	Meeting	08.08.12
Gay, Charles	M	VSO International	Programme Development Advisor	Meeting	02.08.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
			– Participation & Governance		
Gee, Alison	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion and individual chats	19 and 24.09.2012
Gegua, Agnes	F	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Standards Officer, East Kerowogi	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Gertse, Jacqueline and Murtaza, Rushnan	F	Namibia Football Association Women Desk & UNICEF, Namibia	Galz & Goals National Coordinator Chief Education for HIV Prevention & Mitigation	Discussion	21.08.12
Glen, Adam	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia (scheduled)	VSO volunteer (induction phase)	Interview	04.10.12
Green, Paul	M	VSO International	Director of Finance, IT and Corporate Services	Meeting	03 and 12.09.12
Gregory, Damien; Raita, Ionut; and Shanti, Leela	2M /1F	LINK Community Development, Ghana	Volunteers; Cluster and gender Advisor; Schools Development Support Officer; Community Advocacy Support Officer	Discussion	12.09.2012
Guinard, Caroline	F	VSO International	Programme Development Advisor - Planning & Review	Meeting	31.7 & 2.08.12
Gundenbal, Tsolomon	F	VSO Mongolia	Acting Programme Development Advisor – Education & compiled AR education data	Skype & Phone call	03.08.12
Hague, Paul	M	Positive Vibes	VSO Volunteer, Programme Advisor	Meeting	21.08.12
Hamburee, Elieser	M	NANASO, Namibia	Network Liason Officer (since '03)	Group Discussion	22.08.12
Haroon, Alhaji Mohammed	M	Ghana Education Service, District Education Office	District Director West Mamprusi	Interview	11.09.2012
Harrison, Martin	M	MoHSS Directorate Special Programmes, Namibia	Former VSO volunteer now GON staff Finance Manager	Discussion	21.08.12
Hill, Nikki	F	VSO International	Strategic Change Programme Manager - Global Income Change programme	Meeting	16.08.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Hincliff, Kathryn	F	Cambodian Midwives Council, CMC	VSO Volunteer, support to the CMC President	Interview	05.10.12
Hoff, Jacky	F	Friendly Haven, Namibia	Shelter Manager/Social Worker	Interview	20.08.12
Holmes, Liz	F	VSO International	Programme Management Review Manager (a project under Quality & Performance)	Meeting	16.08.12
Hoyle, Dawn	F	VSO Cambodia	Programme Support Manager	IPR wrap up meeting	10.10.12
Hubeira, Neil Mark and Jamoralin, Marilyn	M/F	VSO volunteers Mugana Hospital, Tanzania	Laboratory Technician (1yr placement) & Nurse Trainer	Discussion	05.09.12
Huerta, Ulises	M	VSO Cambodia	Senior Programme Manager for Health	Overview meeting	04.10.12 05.10.12
Pupils	4 F/1M	Primary schools Bukoba district, Tanzania	Pupils	Group discussion over lunchtime meeting	04.09.2012
Ingleby, Clive	M	VSO International	Programme Development Advisor – Health (also former part time RD Southern Africa)	Meeting	31.7.12
Irwin, Shane	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	Tokaut consultant and ex-VSO Volunteer	Conversation	24.09.2012
Jalee	M	Nonghet, Xiengkhouang, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Jauk, Marshall	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	Education Programme Support Coordinator	Conversations and travelling	Several
Jones, Richard	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	Education Programme Manager	Conversations and emails	18-19.09.2012
Jordan, Deb	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Conversation, and she kindly allowed me to invite students for a focus group discussion	20.09.2012
Joss, Ruth Unstead	F	VSO International	Secure Livelihoods Project Coordinator	Meeting	02.08.12
Judge, Lis	F	Learning House, Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Interview	01.10.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Kabong, Mote Eremuge	M	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Standards Officer, Chuave	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Kabyemera, Primus	M	Kolping Society, Tanzania	Deputy National Coordinator	Discussion (arranged at short notice because of plane cancellation)	06.09.12
Kamanire, Farida; Manyanga, Hildegard; and Iloa, Vestine	F	Nyakato Primary School, Tanzania	Head teacher (at school since 2005, head since 3.12) Class teacher (2006) & Academic teacher (Head of Department – 2003)	Group Discussion	04.09.2012
Kamfet	M	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Kamya, Naomi	F	Lutheran Day Primary School, PNG	Senior Teacher and In-Service Coordinator	Interview	24.09.2012
Khaikham	F	Vilabouly, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Khamla	F	Xay, Oudomxay, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Khammouane	M	Learning House, Laos	Programme Manager	Interview	01.10.2012
Khanthavanh, Lamphong	M	Cord (Civil Society Consortium Programme) , Laos	Programme Manager	Interview	02.10.2012
Khantheng	M	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Khouata	F	Vilabouly, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Khozi Mukwashi, Amanda	F	VSO International	Policy Director	Meeting	15.08.12
Kirby, Fiona	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Chat over dinner	20.09.2012
Kirby, Polly	F	VSO International	Programme Development Advisor – Education and overall annual report author	Meeting	09.08.12
Kirenga, Geoffrey	M	Ministry of Agriculture, Tanzania	Director of Crops and Extension	Discussion on fringes of large donor Agriculture Sector meeting	07.09.12
Kittikoun, Ouee	M	CUSO-VSO, Laos	Programme Manager	Multiple conversations	Throughout assessment

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Kono, Samual	M	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Kerowagi DEC	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Kounnouvong, Boutsady	F	Gender and Development Association (GDA; previously the Gender and Development Group) , Laos	Ex national CUSO volunteer and currently the GDA Programme Coordinator	Skype conversation	01.10.2012
Kouro, Lanetta	F	Lutheran Day Primary School, PNG	Deputy Head Teacher	Interview	24.09.2012
Kroskowska, Agnieszka	F	HELVETAS, Laos	Ex CUSO volunteer and currently HELVETAS' Programme & Communications Advisor	Interview	01.10.2012
Kuma, Alfred	M	VSO Ghana	Regional M&E Manager	Interview and working lunch	09.09.2012
Laokhang	F	Nonghet, Xiengkhouang, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Lawlor, Robert	M	FEMINA, Tanzania	VSO volunteer, TV Production Advisor	Discussion	07.09.12
Leonard Batiama; Simon Eten	M	ISODEC, Ghana	TENI Officer (since 08/2012) & support TENI implementation in West Mamprusi (since 10/2011)	Same Focus group discussion and brief chat at end	11.09.2012
Lewa, Minnie	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	Programme Support Manager	Group discussion and she very kindly compiled information that did not yet exist in a single location	18.09.2012
Lewis, Steve	M	VSO International	Head of Policy & Advocacy	Meeting	09.08.12
Lifalaza, Kennedy	M	Positive Vibes, Namibia	Programmes Manager	Meeting	21.08.12
Loeung, Deap	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	Deputy Director of Administrative Affairs and Litigation Department	Interview	04.10.12
Lofthouse, Jo	F	VSO International	Head of Advocacy, Research and External Affairs	Telephone conversations	06 and 10.09.12
Lok, Leandra	F	Provincial Teacher Training Centre, Cambodia	VSO Volunteer, Teacher Training Advisor	Interview	08.10.12
Lomas, Peter	M	Preah Net Preah Referral Hospital,	VSO Volunteer, Hospital	Interview	09.10.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
		Cambodia	Management Adviser		
Luanglath, Touk	F	CUSO-VSO, Laos	Logistics and Administrative Assistant	Conversation-while-driving, and debriefing	25.09.2012; 02.10.2012
Ly, Kreck	M	Eng Veas Tany Primary School, Cambodia	Deputy Director	Interview	10.10.12
Magara, Patrick	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion and several conversations; Patrick kindly arranged two focus group discussions with volunteer counterparts	21.09.2012
Mai	M	Pine, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Makari, Zac	M	NANASO, Namibia	Advocacy & Fundraising Manager (since 2010 but with NANASO since '03)	Group Discussion	22.08.12
Mao, Pen	M	Eng Veas Tany Primary School, Cambodia	Vice Chief	Interview	10.10.12
Marandu, Rose	F	VSO Tanzania	Programme Manager – Health	Group discussion (all PMs) followed by individual interview	03.09.2012
Mayne, Marg	F	VSO International	CEO	Meeting	06.09.12
Mbululo, Muhaiminah	F	VSO Tanzania	Programme Support Manager (providing information on behalf of Finance Manager)	Interview	03.09.2012
Members of a community fishing group (spanning 3 villages)	All Male	Community Fishing Group, Cambodia	Beneficiaries of a Group that covers 1,814 hectares of land and has 851 members	Interview	08.10.12
Members of DEO Management team	15M/1F	Ghana Education Service, District Education Office	Various: circuit supervisor, district training officer, district girls officer; member OD committee, planning	Focus group discussion	11.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
			M&E, community facilitation co-ordinator, basic education, others (7) have finance, HR & statistics roles		
Members of Programme team	8M/2F	VSO Ghana	Programme & Finance staff	Presentation of evaluation, objectives, clarification of expectations and information needs	10.09.2012
Members of Tuntea Farmers Group	3 F/ 2M	Tantong Dabogshi Village, Ghana	Representatives of 100+ member group	Focus group discussion	11.09.2012
Members team	4M/10F	VSO Tanzania	Tanzania Programme management team	Presentation with Q.A session	02.09.2012
Mensah-Baah, Samuel	M	VSO International	Regional Director West & Central Africa	Individual and group discussion & presentation of VSO Ghana Strategy	10.09.2012
Meyer, Giles	M	VSO International	Strategic Change Programme Manager Quality & Performance Change programme	Meeting	08.08.12
Meython	M	Maroom School, Cambodia	SSC	Group discussion	10.10.12
Mirasol, Sherrie	F	Rubya Hospital and Nursing School, Tanzania	Nurse Trainer	Discussion on journey to place of work	05.09.12
Mjomba, Renaldah	F	VSO Jitolee - Kenya	Policy and Advocacy Advisor	Meeting	31.7.12
Moide	M	Standards Officers, Regional Office, PNG	Regional Standards Director	Interview	19.09.2012
Moly, Sam	F	VSO Cambodia	Finance Manager	presentation	05.10.12
Mom, Ang	F	Independent, Camdobia	Business woman	Interview	08.10.12
Monekeo	F	Sepon, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Morris, Steve	M	VSO Malawi	Former acting CD; Programme Development Advisor – Secure	Meeting	02.08.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
			Livelihoods		
Muhamad Al Hassan	M	Presbyterian Agricultural Training Centre, Ghana	Deputy Programme Manager	Interview	11.09.2012
Mulako, Ben	m	HIV/AIDS Management Unit (HAMU) Ministry of Education, Namibia	Senior Executive Officer	Meeting	21.08.12
Mulindwa, Joseph	M	Volunteer Presbyterian Agricultural Training Centre, Ghana	Livestock Production Officer	Discussion	11.09.2012
Mundeta, Bongai; Brendell, Irene; Thomas, Carolina; Tjivikua, Jacky; and Stuart, Dee	F	VSO Namibia	Director RAISA Southern Africa; Programme Support Manager; HIV/AIDS Programme Officer; Programme Support Assistant; Finance Assistant	Presentation & Group Discussion	20.08.12
Munganda, Robert	M	National Institute for Educational Development, Namibia	Senior Education Officer (since 2011 – staff member since '97)	Meeting	22.08.12
Musegura, Sister Anchila and Nshekanabo, Sister Nicholas	F	Rubya Hospital and Nursing School, Tanzania	Member of Hospital Management team & Nursing School Principal	Discussion after brief tour of hospital premises	05.09.12
Mutarewa, Alexander Adrian	M	Bukoba Rural District Office, Tanzania	District Education Officer Community Liaison	Group Discussion	04.09.2012
Mwaje, Kahabi	F	Kileni Primary School, Tanzania	School teacher (since first appointment Feb 2010)	Group Discussion	04.09.2012
Ndyanabangi, Dickson	M	VSO Namibia	Data Analyst (7/11 – 12/12)	Meeting over Dinner	23.08.12
Newsome, Christine	F	Reproductive & and Child Health Alliance (RACHA), Cambodia	VSO Volunteer	Interview	04.10.12
Ntinda, Jeremia	M	AMICAALL Namibia	Country Director	Discussion	20.08.12
Nuov, Sam	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	Deputy Director General	Interview	04.10.12
Ogi, Mary	F	Madang Primary School, PNG	Coordinator Lower Primary	Interview	24.09.2012
Omollo, Fred	M	HIV/AIDS Management Unit (HAMU) Ministry of Education, Namibia	Wellness & Workplace programmes Advisor	Meeting	21.08.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Omollo, Fred ; Richards, Katherine; Bright, Sue; Sworn, Chris; Sworn, Joy; and Hague, Paul	3M/3F	VSO Namibia	Volunteers with HAMU, NANASO, CLASH, TUCSIN, LAC, Positive Vibes	Group Discussion	20.08.12
Ope, Dr	F	Teachers College of the University of Goroka, PNG	Head of Department	Interview	20.09.2012
Ouyumb	M	Teaching Service Commission, PNG	-	Interview	19.09.2012
Pa	F	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Pals, Rio	F	Cord, Laos	Senior Capacity Development Advisor	Interview	02.10.2012
Panonce, Jose Mario	M	PAFO Sekong, Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Interview and joint village visit	28.09.2012
Pee	F	Nong, Savannakhet, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Peghouma, Ibrahim	M	VSO Ghana	Assistant/Acting Country Director, previously Senior Programme Manager – Secure Livelihoods & Education	Working lunch & discussion	09.09.2012
Perroud-Keiber, Catherine	F	iNGO Network, Laos	Director	Joint interview (mostly together with her colleague, Ms Veenman)	01.10.2012
Phom, Kao	M	Maroom School, Cambodia	Village Chief	Group discussion	10.10.12
Phongdeth, Kinoy	M	Association of People living with HIV, Laos	President (and also a Steering Committee member of the Learning House)	Interview	01.10.2012
Phongsay	F	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Shares room with volunteer	Interview	28.09.2012
Phoudavan	F	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Office Administration	Interview	28.09.2012
Pilgrim, Jeff	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion	21.09.2012
Pinaga, Wagano Reynolds	M	Simbu Standards Office, PNG	Senior Standards Officer, Secondary Education	Group discussion	21.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Pokam, Naosomi	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	Finance Officer	Group discussion	18.09.2012
Poloat, Jessie	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	Finance Officer	Group discussion and document review	18.09.2012
PTA/SMC members Walewale (West Mamprusi District)	4M/1F	Ghana	2 PTA chairs; others PTA members 3 were teachers or retired teachers and all were parents of children in the school of their PTA	Discussion	12.09.2012
Quinn, Niamh	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion	19.09.2012
Rachana, Keo	F	Cambodian Independent Teachers Association, CITA	Programme Officer	Interview	05.10.12
Rada, Ing	F	Cambodian Midwives Council, CMC	President	Interview	05.10.12
Ratsamy, Sawai	M	Independent, Laos	Freelance interpreter and trainer of VSO volunteers	Interpreter and informant	27.09-01.10.2012
Representatives of CBHC Group	9F	Trained/supported by TKMOAMS	Community Voluntary Carers	FGD	23.08.12
Representatives of NANASO members	11M/1F	St. John Apostolic Holiness Church; Namibia Traditional Healers Association; St. Emmanuel Youth Club; Hano Youth Foundation; Pashukeni Bridge the Generation Gap on HIV & OVC; Ngaturuise Ehinga Youth Organisation		Group Discussion	22.08.12
Reth, Pheng	M	VSO Cambodia	Senior Programme Manager, Livelihoods	presentation	05.10.12
Richards, Catherine	F	NANASO, Namibia	VSO Volunteer, Advocacy Advisor	Meeting	22.08.12
Rockliffe, Brian	M	VSO International	Director, ICS	Telephone conversation	12.09.12
Rukonge, Audax	M	ANSAF, Tanzania	Executive Director	More substantive discussion on fringes of large donor Agriculture Sector meeting	07.09.12
Rutatinsilrwa, Norbert	M	Kileni Primary School, Tanzania	School teacher (30 yrs in post)	Group Discussion	04.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Sa	F	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Sabugu, Ubald	M	VSO Ghana	Education Programme Officer	Interview	10.09.2012
Saleumsouk, Beykham	F	HJA, Laos	Programme Coordinator	Interview and joint visit to trainee volunteers	26.09.2012
Samanang, Ithsen	M	District Education Office, Angkor Chey district, Cambodia	Deputy Director	Interview	10.10.12
Samrithy, In	M	NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Cambodia	Director	Interview	04.10.12
Sara, Vann	F	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Fisheries Technician	Interview	08.10.12
Sariki	M	Madang Division of Education, PNG	Provincial Education Adviser	Interview	19.09.2012
Sarin, Chhleum	F	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Agri technician	Interview	08.10.12
Science Teachers	5M/2F	Ghana	1 ICT teacher others all science teachers JHS/technical schools	Discussion	12.09.2012
Seng	F	Pathology Laboratory of PAFO Champasak, Laos	Laboratory Officer	Joint interview (with her and her colleague Ms Bpanai)	29.09.2012
Seng, Chhel	F	Eng Veas Tany Primary School, Cambodia	Villager	Interview	10.10.12
Sengaphaivong, Nitipida	M	Laos	Ex-HJA volunteer	Interview	30.09.2012
Sengarhit	M	Learning House, Laos	Admin and Finance Officer	Interview	01.10.2012
Sensevesvorth, Thor	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	Acting Director of Planning and Finance Dept	Interview	04.10.12
Sereisatya, Ros	M	VSO Cambodia	Programme Manager - Education	presentation	05.10.12
Shapumba, Thomas	M	Kunene Regional Health Directorate, Namibia	Director	Meeting	24.08.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Sheard, Jon	M	Preah Net Preah Referral Hospital, Cambodia	VSO Volunteer, Nursing Adviser	Interview	09.10.12
Shihepo, Ella	F	MoHSS Directorate Special Programmes, Namibia	Director Special Programmes	Telephone call	22.08.12
Shikambe, Paulus	M	TKMOAMS, Namibia	PC & HBC Coordinator (since '09)	Field Visit	23.08.12
Shikololo, Leonard	M	TKMOAMS, Namibia	Programme Manager (since '07)	Meeting	23.08.12
Shimbusho, Eustad	M	Kolping Society, Tanzania	Agronomist	Joined discussion for short time only as delivering field training	06.09.12
Shiningwa, Sister Romana; Chibezi, Sister Catherine; and Amalia, Sister	F	Kunene Regional Health Directorate, Namibia	Line manager of Data Analyst Community Nursing Services Line manager 2 X IT vols	FGD	24.08.12
Shrestha, Purna Kumar	M	VSO International	Policy and Advocacy Adviser - Education	Meeting	31.7.12
Shuumva, Hilma	M	NANASO, Namibia	Assistant Training Officer	Group Discussion	22.08.12
Sifong	M	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Technical Officer for Agriculture	Interview and travelling together	28.09.2012
Simmalay.	F	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Simon, Malanilo J.	M	HDT Human Development Trust (partnership completed) , Tanzania	Director of Programmes	Interview	07.09.12
Simonen, Mari	F	VSO International	Chair of International Board	Telephone conversation	07.09.12
Singh, Sanjay	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	Programme Manager HIV/AIDS	Interview	18.09.2012
Sintim, Henry Kofi	M	VSO Ghana	Finance Officer	Discussion and interrogation of figures	10.09.2012
Siphonesay, Kammouane	M	Learning House, Laos	Programme Manager	Interview	01.10.2012
Sithanath	M	Nongdeng Centre, Laos	Counterpart of volunteer	Interview	27.09.2012
Sium, Bairu and	M/F	Bukoba Rural District Office, Tanzania	VSO volunteers	Discussion over dinner	04.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Michelle, Susan (with 2 health volunteers present)				with volunteers present	
Sium, Biaru	M	Bukoba Rural District Office, Tanzania	VSO volunteer	Discussion & accompanied on visits	04.09.2012
Sivapakong	M	PAFO Salavan, Laos	Formal line manager of volunteer	Breakfast meeting	28.09.2012
Smith, Alex	F	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion and conversations while travelling; Alex kindly managed a focus group discussion with students of the University of Goroka	Several
Smith, Janet	F	VSO Cambodia	VSO volunteer, Baseline Assessment Advisor	presentation	05.10.12
Sochea, San	M	VSO Cambodia	Finance Officer	presentation	05.10.12
Soksan, Chap	M	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Finance Manager	Interview	08.10.12
Somkheum	M	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Sonphet	F	Xay, Oudomxay, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012
Sopha, Ang	F	NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Cambodia	Research Coordinator	Interview	04.10.12
Soul, Ke	F	Eng Veas Tany Primary School, Cambodia	Grade 1 teacher	Interview	10.10.12
Sounthane	M	PAFO Sekong, Laos	Current line manager of volunteer	Interview	28.09.2012
Spinney, David	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Conversation, and he kindly allowed me to invite students for a focus group discussion	20.09.2012
Standard 7 and	M/F	Nyakato Primary School, Tanzania	Final year students preparing for	Discussion and	04.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Standard 3 (approximately 20+ students in each)			exams & other key stage assessment	observation of English reading skills; observation of classroom materials etc	
Standard 7 students	M/F	Kileni Primary School, Tanzania	Final year students preparing for exams	Discussion and observation of English reading skills; observation of classroom materials etc	04.09.2012
Stokes, Rachael	F	VSO International	Advocacy and Campaigns Adviser, Gender – employed to develop VSO Gender Equality campaign; also annual report author gender section	Meeting	02.08.12
Students	F/M	Teachers College of the University of Goroka, PNG	Students	Two focus group discussions (one led by Alex Smith)	20.09.2012
Students in girls clubs	5 F/ 2M	Walewale School, Ghana	Most lived in the local town, 2 girls from other schools involved in holiday camp activities	Focus group discussion (with some well rehearsed comments)	11.09.2012
Suleimana, Seidou	M	Ghana Education Service Upper East, Ghana	Planning & M&E Officer	Discussion	12.09.2012
Ta	F	Bungsay, a target village, Laos	Farmer beneficiary	Focus group discussion	27.09.2012
Taylor, Douglas	M	VSO Tanzania	Senior Programme Manager - Education	Group discussion (all PMs) followed by individual interview	03.09.2012
Teachers	12M/8F	Primary Schools in Talensi Nabdam, Ghana	1 head of Junior High School; others Primary Heads or members of School Management Committees	Focus group discussion	12.09.2012
Teley, Leslie	M	Ghana National Education Coalition Campaign, Ghana	National Co-ordinator	Interview	14.09.2012

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Tesha, Rose	F	VSO Tanzania	Programme Manager – Secure Livelihoods	Group discussion (all PMs) followed by individual interview	03.09.2012
Tevie, Solomon	M	VSO Ghana	Finance Assistant	Discussion and interrogation of figures	10.09.2012
Thann, Khem	F	VSO Cambodia	Programme Manager - Health	IPR wrap up meeting	10.10.12
Theary, Dr Chan	F	Reproductive & and Child Health Alliance (RACHA), Cambodia	Director for RACHA	Interview	04.10.12
Theavy, Leng	F	NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Cambodia	Campaign & Advocacy Officer	Interview	04.10.12
Trapani, Barbara	F	VSO International	Strategic Change Programme Manager Impact & Scale Change programme	Skype & Phone call	07.08.12
Uy, Juliet	F	Reproductive & and Child Health Alliance (RACHA), Cambodia	M&E and previous VSO volunteer	Interview	04.10.12
Van Wetter, Jean	M	VSO Tanzania	Country Director	Interview	03.09.2012
Vannak, Nun	M	Maroom School, Cambodia	Teacher	Group discussion	10.10.12
Veenman, Nathalie	F	iNGO Network, Laos	CUSO-VSO volunteer	Joint interview (mostly together with her colleague, Ms Perroud-Keiber)	01.10.2012
Villar Kennedy, Whelma	F	VSO Cambodia	Senior Programme Manager	Overview meeting	04.10.12 05.10.12
Vincent, Shaun	M	VSO International	Regional Director Horn and Central Africa	Telephone interview	30.08.2012
Visetsinh	F	Learning House, Laos	Learning House Assistant and Cashier	Interview	01.10.2012
Vuthy, Chin	M	Aphiwat Strey, Buddhism for Development & Village Support Group, Cambodia	Programme Manager	Interview	08.10.12

Name, first name	F/M	Organisation	Role	Type of contact	Date
Vuthy, Ly	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	Dep Director of Community Fisheries Development Department	Interview	04.10.12
Vuthy, Nom	M	Maroom School, Cambodia	Teacher	Group discussion	10.10.12
Vy, Tong	M	Maroom School, Cambodia	Director	Group discussion	10.10.12
Warren, Patrick	M	VSO Papua New Guinea	VSO Volunteer	Group discussion	19.09.2012
Way, Kieran	M	NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Cambodia	VSO Volunteer	Interview	04.10.12
Winterton, Richard	M	Fisheries Administration, Cambodia	VSO volunteer	Interview	04.10.12
Women members of basket making cooperative	F	Member cooperative Bongo town, Ghana	Members	Observation of work and discussion about group history, challenges & markets	13.09.2012
Woods, Simon	M	VSO International	Head of International IT	Meeting	03.09.12
Wooster, Emily	F	VSO International	Policy and Advocacy Advisor – Health	Meeting	31.7.12
Youjang	F	Nonghet, Xiengkhouang, Laos	HJA volunteer	Focus group discussion	26.09.2012

Annex E: List of data sources

All sources are listed in the bibliography, except for:

- Beneficiary sheets.
- The documents seen as part of a few procurement documentation verification exercises.
- Staffing tables and organograms.
- Lists of arriving and departing volunteers.

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Annex G1: Country programme report 1: Cambodia

Assessed and written by Amisha Patel

Assignment

This assessment is part of an Independent Progress Report evaluation of the VSO Strategic Grant Arrangement. The Cambodia country review was undertaken over a 1 week period from 3rd to 10th October 2012.

Programme

Day 1: Thursday 4th October

VSO Phnom Penh office discussion about the VSO Cambodia Strategy and the health and education sector work. Followed by 3 volunteer and partner meetings;

- i) Christine Newsome – Reproductive and Child Health Alliance (RACHA)
- ii) Gordon Conochie & Kieran Way – NGOs Education Partnership (NEP)
- iii) Richard Winterton and his successor Adam Glen – Department for Fisheries

Day 2: Friday 5th October

VSO Phnom Penh office discussion of livelihoods, M&E and finance work. Followed by 2 volunteer and 2 partner meetings;

- i) Kathryn Hinchcliff – Cambodian Midwife Council
- ii) Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA) partner staff
- iii) Alan Flux – Artisan's Association of Cambodia (AAC)

Day 3: Monday 8th October

Field visit to Battambang Province to meet Scott Fraser and Fisheries partners with Aphiwat Strey and Leandra Lok, teacher training adviser working with the Provincial Teacher Training Centre.

Day 4: Tuesday 9th October

Field visit to Banteay Meachey Province to meet volunteers (Pete Lomas & Jon Sheard) and the partners and beneficiaries at Preah Net Preah Referral hospital.

Day 5: Wednesday 10th October

Field visit to Kampot Province to visit the Education programme in Angkor Chey district with Gemma Bangal who used to work in the Angkor Chey district education office which VSOC has now exited. Meetings with partners and beneficiaries at 2 primary schools (Eng Veas Tany and Marom).

Final wrap up with VSOC Senior Management Team.

I would like to thank all of the staff at VSO Cambodia and Chea Vantha in particular for the planning involved in producing an excellent programme. My thanks also go to the team, volunteers, partners and the beneficiaries for taking the time to talk to me and for sharing their knowledge and insights which all made for a fascinating and enjoyable visit.

The structure of this report follows the structure of the final report of the overall SGA mid-term evaluation. Each section starts with a text box that provides Coffey's guidance in relation to the section.

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

Coffey on the performance assessment against logframe

The extent to which grantees have delivered on outputs and achieved the changes indicated in their logframes. In the first annual review this will largely assess outputs, while subsequent reviews will be able to increasingly assess outcomes. The assessment will be of the whole organization or of the part of an organization's programme covered by the PPA.

VSO Cambodia has provided inputs for health, education, livelihoods and civil society capacity building into the 2012 SGA logframe annual report which specifically relates to ultimate rather than direct beneficiaries. For example; In Education VSO Cambodia claims a contribution to improvements in education quality indicators at the national level using the national education monitoring system EMIS for 2010/11 which recorded an increase in the girls completion rate of 4.4%. In order to disaggregate VSOs contribution to the EMIS data the Education programme manager produced a table presented the completion rate data from the districts that have VSO volunteer support within its schools which show an increase in the girls completion rates compared to a non VSO district. This goes some way to addressing attribution however VSO Cambodia is aware this does not provide an outright *direct* correlation to VSO input resulting in an increase in girls' enrolment rates in Cambodia. Both DFID and VSO are aware of the limitations of these heroic assumptions as agreed within the Strategic Grant Arrangement.

In order to provide more qualitative and direct attribution evidence of its impact VSO Cambodia has begun to use the VSO quality scales as a measure for partner capacity building. The programme team is responsible for completion of the quality scale assessment in consultation with the volunteer and partner staff during the Annual Partnership Reviews. The programme team agree the need for consistency in methodology in application of the quality scales is critical for validity of the data. The Programme team did voice their reservations in the complexity of the quality scales, particularly the need for partners to understand it in order to self assess capacity and provide evidence in support of their scores.⁹⁴ VSO International M&E team should consider i) taking on board the concerns of country offices in order to simplify the quality scales and ii) ensure consistency in application of the quality scales. There is a bigger issue concerning the bias of self-assessments and whether these should complement rather than be the sole impact assessment tool. The overall IPR report will look address this issue in detail.

In recognition of the need for a holistic approach to M&E, particularly for the new country strategy VSO Cambodia has sourced an M&E expert to produce a 'one stop shop' M&E system specific to VSO Cambodia's needs. The ambitious intention of the M&E model is to connect all volunteer and partner reports into a linked excel spreadsheet which can automatically generate M&E reports disaggregated by data requirements and accessible at any time. The intention is to allow more time for analysis than gathering the data and to link to government indicators. I have been informed that the M&E system will also allows for qualitative data collection in the form of volunteer and partner

⁹⁴ Discussion with Vantha Chea, 5th October.

comments on the quality of activities and outputs. Currently the model has 75 indicators which VSO Cambodia recognises as high.

Recommendations

- Limit the number of indicators to those that are required for internal VSO and donor reporting requirements. This is likely to happen as the M&E system is trialled and tested.
- Keep VSO International M&E team closely involved in the process in order to inform central M&E processes and to avoid the development of parallel systems.

The volunteers had varying views on their perceptions of their impact and reach – particularly with regard to capacity building and ultimate beneficiaries. For example Christine Newsome⁹⁵ said it was not always easy to identify who the beneficiaries of her work at RACHA are and admitted she struggled with the VSO forms that request this information. Whereas Richard Winterton⁹⁶ felt comfortable stating his work on the Fisheries Strategic Planning Framework would be of direct benefit to 6 million Cambodians. VSO Cambodia confirmed the need and intention to provide greater M&E training for volunteers throughout their placements.

As part of its new M&E system VSO Cambodia should utilise and encourage the production of external evidence to corroborate (or not) its own assessments. During the most Annual Partnership Review of the Provincial Teacher Training Centre in Battambang the VSO volunteer found the Provincial Office of Education rated the top 5 teachers in the district (as an incentive scheme). 3 of the top 5 teachers were from schools with VSO volunteers.⁹⁷

Recommendations

- As part of the new M&E system VSO Cambodia should design guidance on the methodology of identifying beneficiaries with the volunteers to ensure consistency in the compilation of beneficiary data.
- Introduce counterfactuals into the new M&E system which will be particularly useful when addressing the attribution concerns of ‘heroic assumptions’.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups

Coffey on ‘improving lives’

An assessment of the extent and the manner of changes in the lives of poor and marginalized people as a result of the changes achieved, and the extent to which these changes are likely to be sustained. It is recognised that agency reporting in this area is likely to be illustrative of changes, rather than comprehensive across the portfolio.

The new country strategy plan identifies rural indigenous populations as those most marginalized in Cambodia. “Cambodia is significantly off-track in achieving the millennium goals on basic education, maternal health and environmental sustainability. The poorest areas of the country are the mountain / plateau areas of the North East, home to the majority of the country’s indigenous communities.”⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Interview with Christine Newsome, 4th October

⁹⁶ Interview with Richard Winterton, 4th October

⁹⁷ Interview with Leandra Lok, 8th October

⁹⁸ P1, Cambodia Country Strategic Plan

VSO Cambodia began work in the 4 North Eastern provinces in 2007 – unfortunately due to the distance and limited time permitted in-country for this review I was unable to visit these Provinces and unable to provide evidence to demonstrate results in these areas. However I am able to comment on the intended approach the country office is taking in order to target, support and sustain results in this area – see ‘Sustainability’.

Effects on the volunteers

“I’ve been a VSO volunteer for 10 years and I am already thinking about the next!” Alan Flux (VSO Volunteer in Bangladesh, Mongolia and Cambodia)

These are a few quotes from volunteers, on the impact the experience has made on their lives and on the contributions they were able to make to partners.

“I’m so glad I came out here. And yes I do believe I provided the best skills and capacity building that I could while I was here”. – Jon Sheard

“VSO volunteering is better than other volunteering options. VSO really cares about working with partners in order to make an impact”. – Kieran Way

“I wouldn’t want to be a part of development work in any other way. I think we [VSO volunteers] have so much more credibility because we only earn a bit more than our partners. It wouldn’t be right if I earned thousands of dollars a month.” – Leandra Lok

Why is this important?

The quality and calibre of the VSO volunteer is part and parcel of VSO’s offer to partners. The volunteers undergo a rigorous application and assessment process before they are selected. They [should] want to be there and are motivated by a spirit of sharing and collaboration rather than financial gain. This level of conviction can be a very powerful motivating force for volunteers involved in capacity building and behaviour change which often do not require technical skills – but are little things that take time and patience to deliver results. “A lot of the changes I have made are often very small but important, like teaching the staff how to use track changes in Word or switching off phones in meetings. All of these little things add to the professionalism of the organisation and help it to be a credible partner which the government will want to listen to.”⁹⁹

VSO volunteers become lifelong supporters of VSO and development. This is critical for two reasons;

- i) VSO’s ability to attract strong volunteer candidates for future placements. Many of the volunteers I spoke to heard about VSO from a friend or a colleague. This is crucial for VSO to attract the technical experts it prides itself on sourcing.
- ii) In the current UK financial climate and political climate support for development is waning. DFID must encourage and nurture support for international development in the UK. VSO volunteers are some of the most committed supporters of development that this reviewer has met. It would be

⁹⁹ Interview with Chris Newsome, 4th October

foolhardy and short-sighted to underestimate or undervalue the importance of building UK support for Development.

Representativeness

Representing and responding to the needs and priorities of their constituencies

Coffey on representativeness

The degree to which the supported civil society organisations [this refers to VSO] represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies (including where relevant the poorest and most marginalized). This will include an assessment of whether the planned interventions, as described in the logframe, continue to respond to these needs and priorities.

The civil society partners interviewed as part of this review have been exemplary in their commitment to the voices of the people they represent. The Cambodian Independent Teachers Association is particularly remarkable for successfully lobbying to achieve a 20% increase in pay for teacher salaries and a determination and drive to increase this even further. The Director of CITA fully acknowledges the contribution John (VSO Volunteer) has made to achieve the pay increase. Jon helped CITA with an advocacy strategy suggesting a number of avenues to raise the profile of CITA members and engage meaningfully with the government to discuss salaries and working conditions. He helped to conduct research of teacher salaries in the region and produced a position paper that made a comparison of salaries in neighbouring countries and how low Cambodian wages were by comparison. This was shared with teachers and networks to raise awareness. With Johns help CITA invited teachers and leaders of teachers to Phnom Penh from all of the Provinces to train them in advocacy skills – and John was the lead trainer.

The message of poor teachers' salaries was conveyed to events such as World Teachers Day and collected petitions sent to government donors, Embassies, NGOs and media. He helped CITA build relationships with big NGO's and donors led by UNESCO –to put pressure on the Ministry of Education.

“These were all John’s ideas”. CITA – Rong Chuun, Director

Non IV interventions: National Volunteer (NV) Strategy

VSO Cambodia has a strong, well thought through NV strategy which expands upon the strategic objective 1 in the country strategy – Cambodian people leading their own development' which is also in line with People First and the VSO theory of change. VSO Cambodia has identified that volunteering as VSO defines it is not well known as a concept among Cambodians - it is not well respected or an aspiration for many people. The NV strategy attempts to change the perception of volunteering in the country and highlights the following areas of NV engagement that is already or will be prioritised by the country office;

1) Profile raising of volunteering in Cambodia

VSOC is a member of VolCam – an umbrella agency of International and National volunteering agencies. VSOC is supporting VolCam to raise the profile and increase recruitment of National Volunteering.

2) Targeting youth

Young people under 30 are the biggest demographic in Cambodia and VSOC has rightly recognised the need to tap into this underutilised resource. VSOC is supporting 'Youth Star' which is a local NGO with two 6 month placements to support its youth engagement and increasing volunteerism strategies with the intention of providing a 2 year volunteer to support the Department of Youth develop operational plans in support of these strategies once finalised.

3) Government sponsored initiatives

This relates particularly to community engagement work which VSOC already has a strong track record in delivering community engagement work for health and education. i.e In Kampot district volunteer Gemma Bangal initiated community and parent groups as well establishing student councils in 6 schools in the region fostering parent/community engagement where there had been little interest.¹⁰⁰ Since VSOC exited Kampot province as part of the new strategy in April earlier this year this reviewer found these groups alive and well and committed to continuing and maintaining support to the schools. "Even though she [Gemma] is gone we must learn to walk ourselves" Director, Kampot District Education Office. When asked why he was interested in engaging with the community groups the village chief answered "This is not the time to have illiterate people in our community"¹⁰¹

4) NGO led

This involves building the capacity of Community Based Organisations or (CBOs) to represent and voice the views on local/community issues. For example in Ratanakiri VSO is supporting the capacity of a local CBO to protect its ethnic heritage.

5) Corporate volunteering

VSOC has also embarked upon early stages of volunteering opportunities with large corporate in Cambodia such as the ACLEDA bank who have agreed to send their Bank Managers in one of the target Provinces (in the new country strategy) to schools to discuss the value of education with the students. This is the beginning of a potentially financially fruitful relationship between VSO C and ACLEDA Bank – and other corporate as potential sources of income.

6) Funding for NV Strategy

VSOC has successfully accessed a number of internal VSO funds ('Innovation'; 'Million hours') and external joint VSO-CUSO and CIDA support for its NV programmes –and aims to secure these for future funding and expansion of its NV programme.

Targeting strategy

Coffey on targeting

The extent to which the interventions target the poorest and most marginalized, and the extent to which they target in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit. These targeting strategies are likely to be mutually exclusive, and the assessment will reflect on the way in which the balance between them has been struck. This will include an assessment of whether the targeting continues to be relevant.

¹⁰⁰ Gemma Bangal interview, 10th October

¹⁰¹ Ithsen Samanang, Deputy Director, Kampot District Educational office

The decision to move to the four poorest rural provinces in Cambodia was based on an acknowledgement of the concentration of poor and marginalised indigenous groups in those areas. This review did not cover those areas and therefore cannot provide evidence on the calibre of the volunteering placements available and identified by VSO Cambodia.

VSO Cambodia commissioned 30 short pieces of research from volunteers on key development issues¹⁰². The desk research was followed by conversations with donors and VSO partners to gather their perspectives, and focus group interviews by VSO staff¹⁰³ carried out with 146 people (104 women) from poor communities from around the country to inform its country strategic plan of 3 options which were presented to GLT for discussion and guidance. The three options included;

- 1) Raising demand and capacity for responsive local government (VSOC's preferred choice)
- 2) Good governance (decentralisation)
- 3) Aquaculture and livestock development

GLT advised the country office to pursue a combination of option 1 and 2. As far as this reviewer can see GLT did not provide VSO Cambodia with strategic prioritisation guidance but a combination of all three options (apart from the decentralisation component) and activities.¹⁰⁴

Although the volunteer numbers and the geographic presence have been reduced the strategy is still broad and ambitious. It covers provincial, district and commune councils, provincial and district service management departments, pre-service and in-service training institutions, local CBO's, interest groups and NGO's as well as strategic alliances with NGO's and relevant rights, democracy and transparency campaigns. The target partners also include the Fisheries Administration at national and provincial level, the Department of Post Harvest Production, and to the Department of Animal Health and Production Local community associations around fisheries and livestock cooperatives and private sector stakeholders in fish and meat production and trade.¹⁰⁵ It may well be a sensible to have such a wide-ranging strategy, because VSO's key strength is innovative and quality-focused niche work, and such work may be done at various levels and with a wide range of partners.¹⁰⁶ However, such a wide strategy makes it important to carefully map existing and potential partners to ensure VSO engagement is prioritised and strategic.

Recommendation

A mapping study of all partners in support of the country strategy paper should be completed.

Effectiveness

Learning

Learning that improves VSO Cambodia's own capacity

¹⁰² P1 VSO Cambodia Strategic Planning Options Paper

¹⁰⁴ Capture quotes from GLT email from Vantha

¹⁰⁵ Drawn from the VSO Cambodia Country Strategic Plan options document

¹⁰⁶ An additional reason could be because a wide strategy allows VSO to tap into a wide range of funding possibilities (without, of course, losing track of VSO's core aims and assets).

Coffey on learning

The extent to which grantees learn from their work, and integrate the learning into improved programming, as well as the extent to which others (civil society, governmental and international organisations) make use of this learning in altered policy and practice.

VSO is a learning organisation, and this manifests itself in each of Coffey's three types of learning: to improve VSO's own capacity, to provide contextual knowledge, and to share with other stakeholders. I will cover them in turn.

Learning that improves VSO's own capacity

Coffey on learning that improves the organization's own capacity

This learning is essentially organizational development for the grantee. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved programming, in the intervention from which it arose and beyond.

Good practice learning

In recognition of the need for improving learning from its activities and programmes the M&E manager has highlighted why it would be useful to invest in exiting evaluations;

Exiting happens for one of three reasons:

- *The placement has been successful in bringing the partner to a level of capacity where they are able to 'go it alone'. Evaluation interest: impact of withdrawal and sustainability and further dissemination of the skills/capacity*
- *The placement has not worked out and is being discontinued. Evaluation interest: reasons for failure and the impact of withdrawal*
- *There is a shift to working in other parts of the country (as is the case with the current CSP), limited resources mean that they cannot be spread too thinly, but keeping the 'old' and investing in the 'new' Evaluation interest: to measure the impact, effectiveness and VFM of new/different strategic directions*

Recommendation

VSO Cambodia does need to take a systematic approach to evaluating the long-term sustainability of its programmes in the exited Provinces – especially where there has been a long-term (successive volunteers) partner relationship. I would encourage the new M&E strategy to integrate periodic evaluation assessments of exited provinces in order to learn from and continually improve programming to deliver long term impact.

- feeds into and utilises good practice guidance from the wider VSO family;
- conducts post-closure evaluations to assess lasting impact.

Learning that provides contextual knowledge

Coffey on learning that provides contextual knowledge, essential for good programming: for example learning about the situation of a target population. This learning is largely specific to a particular context and will have little generalizability. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved

programming, in the intervention from it arose.

Each individual volunteer builds networks and contextual knowledge in the course of the placement, and different volunteers estimate the time it takes several months to fully understand a partners capacity and where the volunteer can be of best use.

When asked whether the partners had demonstrated sustained behaviour change and demonstrable impact as a result of previous volunteer support the results from VSOC are mixed.

I cant see any of the changes or improvements made as a result of my predecessor Janice’s inputs. She was driven by improving paperwork but staff are not interested in paperwork. They know how to do it – they just don’t want to”.¹⁰⁷

However Jon found different incentives for learning – often leading by example and repeating why a behaviour change is of importance. He worked with the other volunteer Peter Lomas to design a waste management system in Preah Net Preah Referral hospital to ensure effective waste disposal in the hospital using visual aids to sort and dispose of waste safely. They observed that with continued explanation and demonstration of the benefits new system staff eventually began using it without the need for constant reminders or being under their supervision. They also made a conscious decision to focus training efforts on staff who demonstrated an interest to learn and to improve, concluding it was ‘wasted effort’ to train staff who showed no interest in learning or improvement. “We hope working with the ones who are receptive will show the others and hopefully lead by example”.¹⁰⁸

Recommendation

It might be helpful to map a partner’s incentives and disincentives to different types of change, when drawing up plans. Even if VSO does this, there will be an element of unpredictability, and it is wise to allow volunteers considerable flexibility to deviate from these terms of reference.¹⁰⁹

Learning that can be shared with others

Coffey on learning that can be shared with others

For example, improved ways of ensuring participation of marginalized groups. This is learning that can be generalized from the intervention context. Grantees will need to describe their strategy for communicating the learning and the extent to which others took up the learning. Grantees should also use this section to report on their interaction with the Learning Partnership and its four thematic sub-groups and how this interaction affects their capacity to learn and share learning. This type of learning overlaps with innovation.

VSO does not just share with others: the organisation *is about* sharing with others and VSO Cambodia is no exception. For example on June 2012 VSO staff and partners from nine Asian countries convened in Battambang to “review experience and extract transferable learning on applying market development approaches.”¹¹⁰

The impact of this regional learning initiative has resulted in;

- 1) VSO research on enterprise development to understand what VSO is doing regionally and globally in order to inform where VSO may develop in this area;

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Jon Sheard, 9th October

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Peter Lomas, 9th October

¹¹⁰ Roberts, Sam, “Making Markets Work for the Poor (MMW4P)” paper, September 2012

- 2) Scale up work from micro through to small and medium enterprises
- 3) Identifying tools and approaches for VSO to support inclusive business models at all levels
- 4) VSO is working with Challenges Worldwide and Christian Aid in order to develop a social investment fund to complement its work with enterprises to access capital for expansion and growth.¹¹¹

Quality

Quality of Volunteers

Each partner interviewed as part of this review process consistently commented on the volunteers ability to fit their technical expertise to the Cambodian context. Volunteers are also acutely aware of the importance of understanding of the Cambodian context.

*“I cannot just translate what we do in England. I have to make it useable in Cambodia”.*¹¹²

A number of volunteers credited VSO’s pre-departure training:

“The key to really capacity build is ‘humility’. VSO pre-departure training was critical in ensuring volunteers did not ‘talk down to their partners’ but to listen and ask questions and observe which he believes is the USP of VSO volunteers - ‘to really appreciate the value of exchange of skills and knowledge.” Gordon Connochie, VSO Volunteer.

In Samrithy, Director of the NGO’s Education Partnership (NEP) believes “VSO provides volunteers with strong core values – they are not ‘long-term tourists’ as he has heard non-VSO volunteers beings described by other partners. – VSO are not in this group”.

Common skills and expertise volunteers provide as valued by the Partner;

- 1) Communicating with International donors
- 2) Significant advocacy work – they could do small scale advocacy but not as well without the support of volunteer’s
- 3) Sharing research with foreign development partners in English (most policy documents are written in English)
- 4) The technical expertise the volunteers provides from a developed country ‘so that we can try and understand how that country became rich!’¹¹³

Quality of VSO Cambodia

“VSO has impact outside of its volunteers. VSO is involved in policy discussions and is very well respected in the Ministry of Education – I attended a meeting with the Minister for Education who commented that VSO was not at the meeting....VSO has a long history with the MoE and for providing skilled and experienced volunteers in Cambodia. It is VSO’s engagement at the policy level that has resulted in creating placement opportunities that are most productive.” Gordon Connochie, VSO Volunteer.

A number of partners commented on the policy engagement VSO staff had provided in a number of government and donor meetings such as the Education Sector Working Group.

¹¹¹ P3, Roberts, Sam, “Making Markets Work for the Poor (MMW4P)” paper, September 2012

¹¹² Kathryn Hinchcliff, interview 5th October.

¹¹³ Director of CITA, interview 4th October

VSO Cambodia has implemented facilitating networks across the volunteers creating a ‘VolConnect’ board for all volunteers in Cambodia to add information to share with one another and facilitate regular meetings (regionally) for volunteers.

The country office has now implemented sector and cross sectoral volunteer meetings where lessons can be learnt – this is an excellent idea from which learning from this meeting can also be shared with partners.

Recommendation

VSO Cambodia should ensure learning from the sector and cross-sectoral learning workshops are captured and shared across the organisation.

A number of volunteers have commented that the support provided by the country office has been outstanding. Richard Winterton said “VSO responded brilliantly and literally saved my life” when he was taken ill with a serious heart condition.

On the whole volunteers and partners have been very positive of the support provided by the programme team. However the gaps in staffing for the senior programme health adviser did result in unnecessary delays in supporting Kathryn Hinchcliff with her placement issues with new partner - the Cambodian Midwives Association.

Recommendation

The Programme Office should provide additional support, checks and supervision of volunteer placements with first time partners. This will be of particular importance over the coming months as VSO Cambodia initiates its operations with new partners in the 4 target provinces.

Innovation

Coffey on innovation

The extent to which grantees develop, test, and achieve the adoption by others of new knowledge, such as in techniques, approaches, and design of interventions. Innovation is a special type of learning. It is distinguished from learning in general by novelty.

VSO’s primary assets are its volunteers’ expertise and ability to import international good practice. This renders VSO ideally suited for innovative work.

This requires risk-taking and the recognition that innovation is a matter of trial and error. VSO piloted the production of three example lessons in Khmer, Maths and Science which are used to as an innovative teacher training method involving group learning. The VSO volunteer was able to pilot the DVDs in 3 of the training schools of the teacher training centres she supports in her role at the Battambang Provincial training centre. The volunteer (who had previously volunteered in China) said this was possible in Cambodia because of VSO Cambodia’s strong relationship with the government which allowed VSO the space to explore innovative pilots.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Interview with Leandra Lok, 8th October

Partnership working

Coffey on partnerships

The extent to which partnerships are made with others (civil society, the private sector, governmental and international organisations) that enhance the effectiveness and impact of interventions and encourage sustainability. Partnerships that build sustainability might include:

4. leveraging funds for continuation,
5. securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach,
6. building capacity of southern actors to deliver a service or to monitor service delivery.

In this section I only cover the first two of these three types of partnerships, as the third one is the core of what VSO is about, and covered throughout this report.

Leveraging funds for continuation

DFID is reducing its support to VSO, and the organisation is currently investing in its other funding streams. “Existing commitments are all relatively short term, with our longest donor relationship due to end in 2014. The change [from geographical focus] will involve the loss of some important relationships, including local donor relationships which seemed likely to provide long term resources.”¹¹⁵ A funding Plan was produced with the support of the VSO regional fundraising adviser and donor manager at VSO International earlier this year. The Senior Management Team (SMT) will focus influencing efforts with the top ten donors in Cambodia- building relationships with them in order to position VSO as a means to achieve common goals. The SMT discuss the fundraising plan once a month which has become critical priority for management discussions.

Examples of future donor support include UNICEF partnership agreement to support at least 4 volunteers in the Provinces; CARE provision of \$10,000 for one volunteer etc.

The SMT regularly strategise to horizon scan in order to spot fund raising opportunities – for example the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport (MoEYS) will soon be receiving budget support from WB and other donors. This would be an ideal opportunity for VSO to access funding from the Government and has already established itself as a strong partner with the government and demonstrated an ability to deliver. The EU is also working with the Department of Fisheries and has approached VSO for a volunteer to work on community fishing at the provincial level. These are all strategic (fit into the holistic vision outlined within the country strategy plan) and are highly desirable volunteer placements for VSO. However these are exceptional volunteer placements. I discussed this with the VSO Country Director who informed me of a number of potential funding and volunteering concepts notes that are in early stages of development. A new role focused on fundraising, communications and Governance will be joining the team soon in order to firm up tentative funding commitments.

Sustainability

Coffey on sustainability

Coffey asks evaluators to test the “sustainability hypothesis”, which is that “direct service delivery is localised and unsustainable, whereas civil society holding government to account leads to broader and more sustainable results.” (Coffey Evaluation Strategy, Annex 4, page 2).

¹¹⁵ P2 Strategic Plan Options Paper

VSOC country strategy plan supports this statement “It will increase the demand for better governance generally while specifically engaging community members in the planning and management of services and simultaneously supporting local government to provide responsive and high quality services to meet the expressed needs of the communities it serves.” Ultimately resulting in broader and more sustained results, which supports Coffey’s hypothesis.

VSO Cambodia – Strategic Choices

The VSO Country Strategy identifies its greatest influence and success in its programming to date has been through “collaboration with government on the development of basic services”¹¹⁶. VSO Cambodia is acutely aware of the “ethical dilemma”¹¹⁷ of working with the corrupt ruling party serves to perpetuate its existence. However also recognises its “...interventions have improved the quality of life for poor people.”. Therefore VSO Cambodia’s 5 year strategic plan outlines a continuation of work on basic services and aquaculture and livestock development and the addition of a new focus on good governance and local government accountability. This will see VSO consolidate its volunteer numbers from 100 (as of 2010) to 60 volunteers as of 2012, consolidating its efforts to the 4 poorest areas provinces in the North East of Cambodia, with a gradual withdrawal from the previous 14 target provinces.

Despite the reduction on volunteer numbers and geographical coverage the VSO Cambodia strategy is very ambitious. Particularly with the introduction of good governance as a new area of work. Although it is understandable why this was introduced in response to the concern of the need to continually challenge and monitor corrupt practices within the government. VSO should consolidate its efforts on good governance at the sectoral level in which it has a proven track record and a ‘seat at the table’ with government and donors.

Holistic Approach

The decision to build upon VSO’s existing expertise in basic services and aquaculture and livestock and to make stronger linkages across sectors is the right approach for VSO to achieve a ‘bigger bang for its buck’. It is within these specific sectors that VSO can and does make linkages across the sector – for example in Education VSO volunteers are working at the National level (National Education Programme, CITA) and at sub-national level (just exited from the Battambang Provincial Training Centre) and at community level in schools (Eng Veas Tany Primary and Maroom schools in recently exited Kampot Province). The VSO education programme should ensure learning across each of its volunteers in order to inform policy/decision making. In order to do this VSO Cambodia should continue to identify placement opportunities at each level across the sector for a truly holistic approach that is grounded in a sound evidence base. This will be particularly important when identifying new partners in the 4 new Provinces.

For example a VSO volunteer produced and piloted a programme on early grade reading– which the Ministry of Education Youth and Sport (MoEYS) has decided to scale up throughout Cambodia. There is now a draft country plan to scale up the pilot early grade reading programme across primary schools in Cambodia with the support from VSO and Room to Read plus other players in Cambodia. This plan was produced during 4 days Asia workshop in Bangkok led by the GPE secretariats (funded by DFID, USAID, AusAID). The Ministry of Education in Cambodia will

¹¹⁶ P2 Cambodia Strategic Plan Options (not dated – another recommendation I would make is to ensure all key documents are dated correctly.

¹¹⁷ P2 Cambodia Strategic Plan Options

take further actions to finalise this plan. This is a fantastic example of the significant and substantial development impact a VSO volunteer can make when all of the ingredients/factors are in place i.e. a volunteer with the right skills and attitude, ii) a partner with clear objectives for a volunteer iii) VSO Country Office who understands the bigger picture and can help to make the right connections (in this case a VSO volunteer was in the MoEYS and able to present the pilot work to the MoEYS and recommend its roll out).

Building blocks for Capacity Development

The biggest hurdle is identifying and sometimes creating the opportunities for all of these factors to align for the volunteering placement to have a maximum impact. VSO Cambodia has a strong track record of facilitating the enabling environment. The country office (and VSO International) should invest into understanding how VSO and the volunteer have created the enabling environment to maximize the impact of its volunteers.

The education example is unique in the extent to the success of an innovative approach can be taken on and adopted by the Cambodian authorities. Perhaps because the partners' very limited ability to change, and interest in changing, seeking to strengthen capacity is not always the best possible thing to do. Essentially: you need to want to change to stand a chance of changing, and this is not always the case.

“The biggest issue is the complete lack of accountability in this hospital (Preah Net Preah). The only way to really lose your job is to have the wrong political affiliation. All other poor behaviour is tolerated. There is a nurse who steals regularly. But the Director accepted a bribe to give this nurse a job. So now the hospital is stuck with him”.¹¹⁸

Recommendation

VSO C will need to ensure its efforts to identify new partners in the 4 new Provinces continue to follow a holistic sectoral approach – making appropriate linkages between the National, Provincial, District and community level.

Exiting Strategies

VSO Cambodia initiated learning/exchange programmes from its 'exiting' Provinces to its new Provinces as learning visits/study tours. The teachers and school support groups in Kampot province have been on an exchange programme with the priority Provinces in the North East in order to exchange leadership and management skills and to help the schools in North Eastern province learn from the changes affected as a result of the VSO partnership in Kampot Province. I was also told of a similar advocacy and networking arrangement with exited partners from the livelihoods programme. This activity has also allowed VSO Cambodia to maintain a small footprint in the exited Province. There are no plans to evaluate the exited programmes.

Efficiency and Value for Money assessment

Economy

Coffey on Economy

Relates to the amount of resources or inputs (usually measured in financial cost) which are required to achieve a given output. Fewer – 'cheaper' – resources or inputs represents greater economy (i.e.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Jon Sheard, 10th October.

spending less).

VSO Cambodia has demonstrated several strong examples of delivering 'economy' in its delivery. For example – there are no office drivers. All staff are expected to self drive or use public transport; the office has rented space to the Red Cross and are considering renting out the top floor once the Programme Management Review, and the newly configured structure is complete.

More fundamentally, VSO Cambodia looks at various options with an eye to achieve maximum value for money, and selects programmes accordingly.

Partner Contribution to Costs

This reviewer only found one partner contributing to partial costs of the volunteer. Alan Flux and Leandra Lok had been on other VSO placements. In both of their experience Cambodia was the only country in which the partner had not made any form of contribution to his costs. I did discuss this with the team during the final wrap up discussion and was told of the difficulties of agreeing partner contributions particularly with the government.

Recommendation

VSO Cambodia should enforce a small contribution from the partner to volunteer costs. This should vary depending upon the capacity of the partner.

Language training is provided to all volunteers which all the volunteers cited as an incredibly important part of in-country training. The in-country training language training has been reduced from 4 weeks to 2 since the beginning of this year as a cost-cutting measure. Volunteers confirmed 2 weeks is sufficient to capture the basics of Khmer to support day to day living functions. Although 4 weeks training was beneficial it was not long enough for volunteers to build enough language capacity for volunteers to operate at a business level with partners without the support of volunteer assistants (VA's). It therefore made practical as well as economical sense to reduce in-country language training demonstrating value for money and cost effectiveness. In many cases the VA's were more than simple translators. A number of the volunteers said an inadvertent side-effect of their placements had been the increase in the capacity of their VA's who were often used to lead and deliver workshops.¹¹⁹

Efficiency

Coffey on Efficiency

The relationship between output, in terms of goods, services or other results, and the resources used to produce them. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs, outcomes and impacts? Could more effects have been obtained with the same budget? In other words 'doing the right things at the right price'.

VSO Cambodia has adopted the VSO procurement policy and adheres to good practice procurement principles requiring 3 quotes for any items over \$300, it also has a procurement committee. VSOC were able to show me the asset register and the VSO handbook which is shared with all staff and volunteers and is updated regularly – I was given the latest copy dated September 2012.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Scott Fraser, 8th October.

Effectiveness

Coffey on Effectiveness

The extent to which objectives are met. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how far have the project or programme's outputs and impacts contributed to it achieving its objectives? An example would be: did the teacher placement programme improve the quality of the school curriculum or raise achievement?

VSO Cambodia provides volunteers at three levels:

National

Government institutions: The support to the Department of Fisheries Association has been successful and delivered good value for money. The 10 year Strategic Plan has been a considerable success for VSO and the government. It is the long-term relationship with the FiA that is now bearing the fruit of VSO investment. The legacy of the VSO support to the FA has been the creation of sustainable systems that will continue to exist when they have left as they are designed working closely and collaboratively with Cambodian colleagues.

When asked if he would prefer to take the equivalent annual financial value of Richard (£22,000) the Deputy Director General replied "we'll take Richard! He is value for money!"

National Basic Services Secretariats: The NGO Education Partnership (NEP), Reproductive Child Health Alliance (RACHA), Cambodian Midwives Council (CMC), Artisans Association of Cambodia are all recipients of VSO volunteers. The first two are established partners within which capacity has clearly been built through the support of the volunteers. Whether this capacity will be sustainable beyond the on-going relationship with VSO cannot be completely guaranteed. However the long term nature of the relationship does mitigate against the risk somewhat.

When asked what happens when the Cambodian staff who have benefitted from the volunteer's capacity building support leave NEP – doesn't this leave them back at square one? The director responded "you have to think of the bigger picture – building the capacity of Cambodians is essential to the future of the country's stability – its not just one person – its an on-going process. If VSO continues to provide volunteers the learning will go to the people".

NGO umbrella Organisations: The Cambodian Independent Teachers Association (CITA), The Artisans Association of Cambodia (AAC). CITA's success at lobbying for increased teachers salaries is noted in P6. The AAC has successfully influenced the Ministries of Tourism and Commerce to secure exhibition spaces for Cambodian products at regional trade fairs.

Province/District

Provincial/District authorities: Battambang Provincial Teacher Training Centre, Ankor Chey District Education Office. The Battambang Provincial training centre has demonstrated results in improved listening, reading and writing for over 3,000 pupils.¹²⁰ The Ankor Chey District Education office has seen increases in the enrolment and completion rates in the schools with VSO volunteer support and a decrease in the drop out rate.¹²¹

Community

¹²⁰ Battambang Provincial Teacher Training Centre Annual Partner Review February 2012

¹²¹ Interview with Deputy Director Ithen Samanag, 10th October.

Community Based Organisations: Aphiwat Strey – rural livelihoods NGO in Battambang Province has received capacity building support from successive VSO volunteers to produce a strategic plan, build technical skills in market chain analysis and small business development for 58 rural villages. Aphiwat Strey has utilised its capacity to support a number of community beneficiaries such as Ang Mom – a business woman in Battambang who received training on small business development, market processing and bookkeeping – and is now receiving support and advice on improving her produce and expanding her market. “I could not have expanded my business without the support of Aphiwat Strey and the VSO volunteers. I want to learn more so that I can grow and become more successful”.¹²²

Value for money of SGA funding

The SGA contribution forms 59% of the VSO Cambodia budget, and a discontinuation of the SGA contribution would require a dramatic cost-cutting and scale-cutting exercise. Currently SGA funding is spent on:

Value for money assessment of SGA funding

VSO Cambodia receives 59% of unrestricted funding – of which 85% is funded from the SGA. A discontinuation of the SGA contribution would require a dramatic cost-cutting and scale-cutting exercise. The utilisation of this contribution does not have a strategic focus and is instead used to fill budget gaps. It is spent on:

Country Office Cambodia, Budget Submission for 2011/12

DESCRIPTION	2011/12 Revised Budget (£)	
	DFID Grant	% of DFID Grant
Staff costs	244,895	42%
Volunteer costs	297,890	51%
Premises and utility costs	12,856	2%
Office costs	11,389	2%
Travel and accommodation	8,347	1%
Marketing and publicity	0	0%
Fundraising and events	0	0%
Governance	806	0%
Equipment costs	2,794	0%
Programme costs	9,137	2%
TOTAL	588,115	100%

VSO Cambodia is acutely aware of its dependency upon DFID SGA unrestricted costs for staff salaries and volunteers. The fund raising strategy will also need to consider how to incorporate VSO staffing costs within its funding proposals as donor funding is increasingly limited to restricted programme support.

¹²² Interview with Ang Mom, Battambang business woman, 9th October

Annex G2: Country programme report 2: Ghana

Assessed and written by Sue Enfield

Country Programme Assessment

This assessment is a part of the Strategic Grant Agreement mid-term review of VSO's work. Ghana was selected as one country amongst six, for in depth review since it was implicated early on in the Programme Planning Process (PPP) through which country strategy is reassessed and programme direction adjusted accordingly. We therefore assumed that given this early inclusion in the process, implementation of any revised strategy would be further advanced than in late adopters. In addition Ghana acquired Middle Income Country status (2010) and consequently falls outside the VSO corporate desire to focus most of its work on low income countries and fragile states. It is therefore of interest to review how strategy has been adapted to reflect this status.¹²³

I spent 2 days in Accra with the Regional Director West & Central Africa, Country Director, immediate past Assistant Country Director, programme staff with responsibility for work in education and livelihoods and the Finance team. I then flew to Tamale to embark upon a 3 day programme of visits to partners in Northern and Upper East regions, from education and livelihoods sectors. I was accompanied by the immediate past Assistant Country Director throughout this part of the evaluation allowing me to have several helpful conversations about the intent, impact and revisions to partnerships with those organisations visited. Back in Accra I was able to visit a national advocacy partner working on Education for All. In all cases I was able to meet key staff from the partner, immediate beneficiaries who engaged most closely with the volunteer, volunteers themselves and ultimate beneficiaries (school students, teachers, members of parent teacher associations and school management committees, and small farmers).

I would like to thank all who helped me to understand the VSO work in Ghana. The structure of this report follows the structure of the final report of the overall SGA mid-term evaluation. This is the same for all PPA/SGA reports and was developed and imposed by DFID.

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

VSO Ghana programme should make a clear contribution to organisation results reporting in education and livelihoods, since the programme does not work in health or HIV. The Annual Country Review Report is very general, with emphasis on activity reporting and contains little significant results information. The quality of logframe based reporting is rather poor. For example in education, delivery of lessons is said to be more effective and the managerial skills of head teachers improved – otherwise results reporting actually describes activities rather than the result of having conducted these activities.¹²⁴ Anecdotal information on impact reports some change in girls' behaviours out of school, and students indicate some improvement in their teachers' attitudes in class. There is no indication of the scale of impact, the number of schools involved or whether there is any detectable improvement in end of year results or primary school leaving exam pass rates.

The basis for this reporting is the Comic Relief funded programme Tackling Education Needs Inclusively (TENI) operational since June 2009. A baseline exercise ended only in June 2011.

¹²³ Ghana was flagged for radical reshape from March 2011 – GLT meeting re Country Closures

¹²⁴ Formation of girls clubs, in-service training, creation of a strategic plan and a district INSET model

We are rolling out M&E systems and collecting data now (Year4 of this project). If we are unable to track, it means the entire VSO is unable to track
Project Manager TENI

As part of the organisation's Annual Reporting, 7 partners in education were reviewed using the new Partnership Monitoring and Learning Tool (PMLT). This evaluation followed the trail of one of these the District Education Office West Mamprusi surveyed on 3rd February 2012. Results in this form record numbers of male and female practitioners trained; reach in terms of male and female beneficiaries (school students) and boys/girls completing quality education. Comparing information in the data collection tool with that recorded in VSO London aggregated data set there is a difference in the latter of 48 (lower) in practitioners trained otherwise numbers are consistent. Thus there is some small margin of error in internal data collection and capture (which goes towards aggregate targets reported to DFID).

However there is a significant difference in the number of boys/girls completing quality education reported to VSO (3871) and the *Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) results analysis provided by the same district office to this evaluation in which just 1271 students passed exams at the end of the school year 2010/11.*¹²⁵ *From this we can only conclude that numbers reported during the PM&L exercise are not verified from any published data and over reporting has potentially skewed the overall VSO reporting.*

In an attempt to triangulate and confirm these 2 varied data sources EMIS data for Ghana was requested and supplied by the programme office. This it was explained is always a year behind and by the time it is published about one and a half years behind. The data set contains figures on enrolment by gender and by district; pupil teacher ratios; numbers of trained teachers and numbers of students repeating at any level of Kindergarten, Primary or Junior High Schools. It does not disaggregate the latter by year group so it is not possible to infer by deduction primary completion rates. These are not included by district; P6 completion rates by gender are only contained by region.

Information from 2008-2009 was used in our reporting for 2010-2011. In my case I inter projected the 2010-2011 figures based on the trend of percentage increase for the past years.
Dora Amoah-Bentil immediate past Programme Manager for Education

Whilst it is unclear quite what mathematical calculation was made and which national data was used to perform this operation, it has to be concluded that results information concerning basic education completion reported by the Programme office is unreliable and cannot be independently verified.

¹²⁵ Academic year runs September to June/July therefore results from June 2011 should have informed VSO monitoring February 2012. *Three interpretations are possible. Either: the over-reporting is 2600, taking students who complete by passing from the number reported as completing. Or, 2132 students presented for final exams in June 2011 of which 1271 qualified, meaning that 861 students either completed primary school without passing, or did not complete but will repeat the year. This reduces over-reporting to 1739 but the data is meaningless as it includes students who complete but fail. Or the figure of 3871 is an estimate, given in February about students who may present for final primary exams in June 2012 but with no knowledge of how many will successfully pass in which case it is also meaningless.*

In livelihoods a partnership with the Ministry of Food and Agriculture is described in the ACR as a direct result, with impact reported as “farmers getting more yields from cocoa which translates into higher income.” Again there is no data to substantiate this statement¹²⁶.

A similar verification exercise was attempted with a livelihoods partner visited during this evaluation and from which data had been collected using the PM&L tool in February 2012. Bongo District Assembly has been supported since at least 2003 by volunteers. While initial focus appears to have been limited to a small basket making cooperative of women (with 120 members reported at its maximum) the current volunteer is expected to support the district strategy of developing livelihoods for those involved in guinea fowl rearing, basket making and shea butter production.

The PMLT does not specify which stakeholders or beneficiaries were involved in completing the review and providing the data found in this tool¹²⁷ and states that 2,814 female and 1,091 male beneficiaries were reached by services provided in livelihoods during the year. This data contributes to results reporting within VSO London, with figures exactly reproduced. However no reference to such activities or scale of activities was made by the volunteer¹²⁸ or her counterpart during an extensive interview. Rather this volunteer who had completed two successful placements in other VSO programmes seemed to be struggling valiantly to understand and deliver what was expected of her since the key staff contact within the District Assembly had departed after many cycles of collaboration with VSO, leaving in his place a new Planning Officer whose focus and interest lies with tangible development gains such as roads and district infrastructure. The volunteer demonstrated commendable persistence, has made some attempt to assist farmers in exploring markets citing the example of one guinea fowl farmer who wished to branch out into groundnut production, though freely admitted “Information sources are really from within the community themselves,” suggesting that her capacity to make a meaningful contribution is limited. The results information relating to this partner could therefore not be independently verified.

Performance against VSO Ghana Strategy

The interim strategy sets out resources required¹²⁹ to deliver the preferred strategy *Rights to services and responsiveness* and plans for 59 international volunteer arrivals in 2011/12 with a reach to 328,228 beneficiaries. This is projected to grow substantially to 1,462,216 beneficiaries in the current year 2012/13. The strategy also describes in detail a total of 103,584 direct and 81,180 indirect beneficiaries (total 185,265) who will be the main beneficiaries of programmes.¹³⁰ Actual data collected during the 2010/11 baseline exercise shows 23,902 Intermediate beneficiaries 579 938 ultimate beneficiaries.

There is no coherent logic linking any of these numbers or any reasoning apparent behind the considerable growth projections made and I conclude that the collection and use of quantitative information is erratic.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Step 8: Poor and marginalised people have improved lives

In a search for information on qualitative impact on the lives of beneficiaries of VSO partners the

¹²⁶ The evaluation had selected to visit this partner, but it was deselected by the country team in preference for visits in the North within the limited time available.

¹²⁷ Question 3.4 is blank

¹²⁸ Who had been in post for 6 months at the time the PMLT is dated

¹²⁹ Final resourcing summary template Page 8

¹³⁰ Page 4

evaluation sought out results data from primary school completion exams from both district education authorities visited; surprisingly the Programme Office had not sought to do this and to include it within results reporting. Even the TENI Programme Mid Term Review¹³¹ states “Retention and transition to JHS are gradually improving” but does not provide evidence to back up this statement. In my view the findings (results data) tabulated below are inconclusive.

Period	No. taking final Exam	No. passing	% pass rate	No. taking final Exam	No. passing	% pass rate	Teacher Attitude & Skills rating (from Education Quality Scales)	Education Management Rating (from Education Quality Scales)
	West Mamprusi District			Talensi- Nabdam District				
2004/5 ¹³²	790	255	32.3	No data				
2005/6	787	330	41.9	988	456	46.15		
2006/7	1034	536	53.8	963	567	58.88		
2007/8	1440	374	26.2	974	523	53.70		
2008/9	1703	731	42.9	1495	661	44.21	2	2
2009/10¹³³	1652	749	57.5	1106	304	27.49	3	3
20010/11	2132	1271	59.6	1299	504	38.0	2	No data

Both districts are included in the TENI programme and there is an expectation that the programme will deliver impact in every school¹³⁴ via its focus on inputs to improved efficiency within the district education office, whole school development and attention in schools and in the community on the importance of girls receiving and completing an education. Although the District Director of Education was keen to claim credit for the improvement in results since his arrival in post¹³⁵ and organisational assessment workshops conducted by VSO volunteers with his staff, this is actually the continuation of a trend from a very low point.¹³⁶ There is no equivalent trend in Talensi-Nabdam so it seems premature and unfounded to attribute any improvement in results to the impact of VSO/TENI. Information clearly displayed on the wall of this DEO also showed a total of 10 agencies¹³⁷ working in the district on education, so even when there is consistent improvement at results level it will be difficult to attribute impact to VSO. Pass rates for girls lag consistently behind those of boys by at least 10% points and the gap is not narrowing. In Talensi-Nabdam it is interesting to note that although through self assessment partners felt there was some improvement in teacher skills and schools management this is not mirrored in results for their ‘best’ year. This illustrates that such subjective information is not a robust indicator of quality and does not translate through into impact for beneficiaries.

The second area of outcome in VSO Theory of Change is that civil society is better able to hold governments to account resulting in better development and implementation of pro-poor policies.

¹³¹ Conducted by Zonzongili Development Associates March 2012

¹³² Taken as a start point as an all time low in district figures from 1995

¹³³ Academic year in which TENI programme starts

¹³⁴ Interview with TENI Programme Manager

¹³⁵ October 2009

¹³⁶ That appears to have been provoked by the surge in school attendance as a result of free compulsory primary education policy and its immediate impact on quality of teaching

¹³⁷ Including World Vision & WSL working on whole school development; CARE, CAMFED & RAINS working on promoting girls education

The partnership with Ghana National Education Coalition Campaign (GNECC) responds to this aim, though the partnership has not been continuous¹³⁸. Although an isolated example of the type of partner VSO may support to build the capacity of civil society voices, the nature of the partnership was interesting in illustrating objectives. The GNECC is a relevant partner to support with a mandate to represent civil society position on application of Education for All policy, an established role and dialogue with Government since 2006 in education sector review processes and some credible claims of impact.¹³⁹ However baseline work on rights to education carried out in central region and leading to work on citizens engagement (for which the simplified policy documents were required) had to be repeated as the focus of VSO interest was on Northern regions and it was not known if the same concerns were present.

VSO approached us saying we would like to place volunteers, do you have a need? We had to strike a balance with VSO's interest in the Northern Region because of TENI.
National Co-ordinator GNECC

The relationship has not been entirely satisfactory since the first short term volunteer did not complete the task, there has been a gap of one year before the current volunteer arrived and it seems that she too may not complete task in the time allocated "there will be scope for continuation"¹⁴⁰ although in part this may be because of her own past experience and interest in Special Education she is now responding to a request from the TENI Programme Manager for a position paper on Special Needs Inclusion policy. VSO volunteers were compared unfavourably with professional interns provided for short term tasks through World University Service of Canada (WUSC) described as "faster and more efficient in delivering the product requested, bringing in more experience"¹⁴¹.

There did not appear to be clear match in this one case with building the capacity of the partner to work on internally identified priorities and responding to related needs/interests of the VSO Education programme. In summary while the partnership appears appropriate it has not been managed effectively and there is no evidence of VSO contribution to impact achieved by the coalition, which also works with Action Aid on girls education to greater effect. I did not find other evidence of VSO building civil society capacity to hold governments to account although the work with school management committees and Parent Teacher Associations within the TENI programme has created a forum for dialogue between duty bearers and parents and this is an important first step.

Relevance

Representativeness and targeting strategy

¹³⁸ 1 volunteer prior to October 2008; a second 6mth STV to simplify policy documents; a third in post since February 2012 to complete this task

¹³⁹ After protracted discussions with Government party then in opposition, the capitation grant was increased by 50% when the current party came to power in 2009.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with serving volunteer

¹⁴¹ A particular advantage was flagged in that when the person requested arrives in timely manner, funding already secured for the work in question can be effectively used. Where there is a long delay a volunteer may only arrive at a time when further resources need to be sourced resulting in inefficient use of their skills.

Step 1: identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies

VSO in Ghana began to review existing country strategy (2005-2010) from September 2009¹⁴² as the period neared a close, and thus elected to become one of the pilot countries in the Programme Planning Process (PPP). As a result of this extended process, two programming options were proposed with a preference for a programme which “will focus on strengthening poor people’s access to their rights (in education and health) and strengthening the capacities of governance institutions at all levels, including traditional governance institutions to adequately respond to the voice of the people.”¹⁴³ This document is permissive and argues for a broad programme, supporting young people all over the country¹⁴⁴, and otherwise supporting the various target groups (women, girls, people with disabilities, small farmers) in the northern regions as well as people excluded from services by reason of poverty or stigma, across the country. A subsequent iteration of this document¹⁴⁵ attempts to describe a 12 month transition from March 2012 to April 2013¹⁴⁶ during which the programme will be “reshaped to serve as a regional hub of influence” in West and Central Africa, with regional office staff supporting work with regional donors, multilateral agencies and civil society groups on regional programmes and advocacy. Child trafficking between Burkina Faso and Ghana and climate change are flagged as regional issues, though “VSO Ghana has yet to develop a climate change policy and approach.”¹⁴⁷

The logframe integrated in this second document does not reflect this regional intent, and deals with

- Formal and non formal education for women and girls
- Empowering cocoa growing communities in Eastern region (an ongoing funded programme commitment)
- Empowering young men and women to participate in decision making
- Increased economic power for young men and women through business management skills

This interim strategy was said to have been agreed (July 2012) and the new Country Director¹⁴⁸ is tasked with developing a sound Country Strategy within the next year.

The process to date does not seem efficient: extensive consultations with partners were undertaken but are not referenced in either of these documents such that evidence for choices made is lacking; both documents are broad and seem to reflect a desire to work with all categories of needy people; there is no capture of learning from the programme’s work up to this point; and the process has been extraordinarily protracted (lasting from late September 2009 to September 2012 and beyond). There is a stated “shift of programme emphasis and inputs to the three Northern regions”¹⁴⁹ where just 17% of the population resides;¹⁵⁰ no rationale with evidence for this is provided.¹⁵¹ There is also

¹⁴² Reported by immediate past Acting Country Director

¹⁴³ Putting People at the centre of our work in Ghana – July 2011

¹⁴⁴ “living in urban slum areas, in peri-urban and rural communities in Greater Accra, central, Western, Ashanti and northern savannah regions”

¹⁴⁵ Undated, VSO Ghana Strategy 2012

¹⁴⁶ A 14 month period

¹⁴⁷ VSO Ghana Strategy 2012

¹⁴⁸ 3 weeks in post at the time of the IPR evaluation visit

¹⁴⁹ Page 8 VSO Ghana Strategy 2012

¹⁵⁰ Ghana Statistical Service Population and Housing Census September 2012

¹⁵¹ Income poverty section of Putting People at the centre of our work in Ghana reports falling levels of poor people (to 28.5% 2005/06 falling from 39.5% 1998/99 with extremely poor declining from 26.8% to 18.2%) and also states that ‘Poverty is deepening in urban slums, peri-urban communities in Greater Accra, central, Western, Ashanti and northern savannah regions’

a clear intent to follow donor funds where these can be secured and work outside this area.¹⁵²

This step in the value chain should identify where VSO can add the greatest development impact with best value for money. Finance staff pointed out that the cost of placing a volunteer in the South greatly exceeds doing so in the North and this was perhaps one of the reasons to focus on the North, as they equated value for money with the cost of a volunteer.¹⁵³ The country strategy states “VSO, based on its experiences in Ghana to date and its USP, is best placed to help strengthen capacities of organisations representing poor and excluded social groups in order that they can access and exercise rights guaranteed them under the constitution and also benefit from the country's MIC status” but does not report on previous advocacy successes or work with rights based organisations. I have not seen evidence to back up this statement.

Step 2: identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies

The previous focus on sector work in Education, Livelihoods, National volunteers, Participation and Governance and Disability is felt to have been too broad to deliver demonstrable impact, and yet the current interim strategy has only discarded (some) disability partners. At the start of the period under review, part way through the PPP process, the programme office has incomplete partner lists that do not clearly show which partners are chosen to work with in line with country strategy. Two lists provided in advance of the country visit show i) current partners at March 2011 and ii) those to be included within the transition strategy. Eight Government partners and one CSO in the North¹⁵⁴ appear on this second list thus appearing to be new partners but in reality several have been partners since 2009 at least. Three disability and one gender partner appearing on both lists, were later marked as being partners that the programme will no longer work with in the future; two current partners in the Cadbury funded project do not feature on any list.¹⁵⁵

There was no documented evidence of partnership mapping; that is any investigation of other potential partners, during the extensive strategy revision process with a clear identification of new partners to be brought into the programme. One new livelihood partner¹⁵⁶ reported that “we had to find them” having been aware of VSO presence in the region and needing a specialist to work with their membership to strengthen economic production systems and record keeping.

The Annual Country review confirms that the programme will move towards a more integrated approach over the coming year (ie from March 2012) focusing interventions in the Northern regions. This integrated approach reflects a cluster model where volunteers with different skills, placed with separate partners in one geographic area will be encouraged to work together for better peer support, cross fertilisation and learning between their host organisations and an expectation of greater impact since education, livelihood and governance skills could be deployed into the same target community. Criteria used to kick start a cluster is a minimum of 5 volunteers in a district and allocated to education, livelihoods and participation and governance work.¹⁵⁷ This approach has been presented to partners and is being trialled in one district¹⁵⁸ since February 2012; it is modelled on an approach described in Cameroon since 2009 although evidence for additional impact from

¹⁵² “The programme will also operate where external funding is available, or will be provided, with a potential to make further impact on the Ghana economy as a whole.” Scenarios paper July 2011

¹⁵³ Interview with Finance section staffs

¹⁵⁴ GH0997; GH0543; GH1016; GH0939; GH0940; GH0559; GH0938; GH1015

¹⁵⁵ Highlighted by former livelihoods Programme Manager now Geographic Programme Officer

¹⁵⁶ Guinea Fowl Farmers Association Bolgatanga

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Geographic Programme Officer

¹⁵⁸ Talensi Nabdram

such an approach was not available. The approach described was well received by volunteers in Talensi Nabdam who already function as loose networks of self supporting professionals in a given area. It was less well received by a key long term partner in whose region the pilot district falls¹⁵⁹.

“There have been frequent changes in strategy of VSO and very fast. They do not even wait for 5 years before another change. This concept of sharing skills is being restricted. “

Regional Director Ghana Education Service Upper East Region

While the earlier move from many classroom teachers across schools, to district based sector specialists focused on for example maths or science teaching methodology still provided for an overall increase in education quality across a region, the cluster system is not understood to provide added value but rather to restrict impact to those few select districts in the pilot. There are evident practicalities still to be resolved since if any one given volunteer works with more than one partner organisation it is not clear how their time will be negotiated, their travel resourced and their inputs in more than one place jointly planned and mutually agreed between different ‘employers.’

There was some valid concern, expressed by two volunteers at least, that the partner choices did not reflect a strategic engagement at central Ministry level with the potential to influence policy and resourcing, necessarily complemented by CSO partners working on advocacy, and by district level placements impacting on community service delivery.

“You can’t just change a system from the bottom, going over old ground and re-filling the same placements without reviewing partner’s current need”

“Work should be on the ground if that is where there is greatest need, but this does not sit comfortably with the former RD’s statement that ‘there will not be volunteers in Accra in future”

Volunteers working on policy advocacy and quality of services delivered in education

Effectiveness

Learning

Learning that may improve VSO Ghana’s own capacity

Integration of education and livelihoods (to pay for children’s education) was a feature of the TENI programme design so this has set the direction for this integrated approach.

Regional Director West & Central Africa

¹⁵⁹ Former Acting Country Director explained that the model had been presented to affected partners and was well received, however he could not explain the practicalities of working for more than one employer, whose responsibility allowances/accommodation became etc. Only one affected partner was interviewed, the pilot is still in early stages.

This suggests that an integrated approach working on related aspects of a community's needs has been found to deliver greater overall impact. I did not find any evidence for this although theoretically it seems sound.

Learning that should improve partners' capacity

The Ghana programme has received specific restricted funds for an Action Learning Programme designed to strengthen the learning capacities of partners.¹⁶⁰ Although the interim strategy states "we will continue implementing the Action Learning project with our current partners until September 2012" the ACR does not report on this or any other aspect of learning. I did not find any additional evidence of learning or of operational learning systems.

Innovation

The ACR does not describe any example of innovative interventions. Nothing additional was noted during the course of partner visits.

Partnership working

The evaluation asked repeatedly to see the paper trail that we believe is established for each partnership in order to understand the systems applied to conduct capacity assessments; establish partnership objectives; monitor through volunteer and partner reporting; assess impact through annual partner reviews. I have not been able to see a complete trail for any of the six partners visited¹⁶¹ and conclude that these tools are not routinely completed in this programme office.

The programme's recent leadership suggests¹⁶² that the first stage in this chain (conducting a thorough assessment and a partnership plan before further investments in a long term partnership and/or organizational development process) will now be achieved by clustering volunteers; this being because of "the limited level of the financial and human resources that we have." This is further indication of the unusual way in which partnerships appear to be managed in Ghana. The ACR also reports that "The volunteer community has been more involved with the PO than with the partner organizations" and "The PO communicates with partners through volunteers." Now it seems, that the programme is moving to a position where serving volunteers would become the eyes and ears of VSO in the field, giving them a key role in ongoing observation of partners, informing capacity assessments and ultimately partner choices. This is not my understanding of the role of volunteers (whose employer is the partner organization) but is the role of VSO programme staff – who in this programme are comparable in number to other programmes of similar size and geographic spread¹⁶³.

Sustainability

This section is about VSO Ghana's ability to generate and grow funds. One of the reasons for VSO choosing to remain in this middle income country (MIC) was that "there is a high potential for

¹⁶⁰ Running since June 2009

¹⁶¹ Discussed in more detail under Efficiency below

¹⁶² Discussions, email and diagram provided by immediate past Acting Country Director

¹⁶³ 16 programme/admin staff and 2 offices as at August 2012; compared to 15 staff 1 office in Tanzania (see also efficiency)

funding programmes.”¹⁶⁴ In 2011/12 £74,000 was raised in country (3 applications), applications for a further £132,281 were unsuccessful (2 applications) and one decision is still pending (\$45,000).¹⁶⁵

Comparison of two year’s data on actual income – 2010/11 & 2011/12 – shows the proportion of the country budget covered by unrestricted funding¹⁶⁶ rises from 23% to 28%. In the current budget year 2012/13 this is predicted to fall to 24%.¹⁶⁷ In addition a substantial part of the budget is provided by CIDA PPA funds (16%, 17% & 8% in the same years). This income will cease from the current year 2012/13 following a decision by CIDA to withdraw emphasis on Ghana. National Volunteering programme work and the staff post related to this is CPPA funded; there is concern that this will come to a close unless alternative funds are secured.

Unrestricted funds are allocated (2011/12) as follows: 35% to staff costs; 54% to volunteer costs; 10% to office costs and 2% to programme costs. Since 2008 the costs of just one volunteer have been met by the organisation hosting them¹⁶⁸ and only secondary schools have provided housing to teachers; otherwise most costs of allowances, housing and utilities are met by VSO – from DFID core grant or restricted funding. This undermines the principle of valuing volunteers who are seen as a no-cost or low-cost resource for partners.

The balance of restricted income has been provided in all years by 4 donors¹⁶⁹ with a high contribution from Comic Relief, rising to 41% of budget in the current year, through the Tackling Education Needs Inclusively (TENI) programme now in Year 4 of a five year programme. The 25% funding provided by VSO to match the 75% Comic Relief contribution has not been mobilised in country – a substantial part if not all¹⁷⁰ comes from the DFID PPA grant. There is a moderate degree of reliance upon the DFID SGA ‘unrestricted funds’ to maintain the Ghana programme and some progress towards reducing this dependency as new sources of restricted funds come on line.

Efficiency and value for money assessment

Generally office systems did not appear efficient: a map of Ghana populated with volunteer data was out of date and incorrectly colour coded to sectors of operation. Partner lists provided to illustrate the situation March 2011 were incomplete.¹⁷¹ Finance data provided did not match that provided by VSO London¹⁷². Key documents requested twice in advance of the evaluation visit were not made available on arrival or in response to a third request in country. This was flagged during the feedback meeting and ‘unsafe HTML format files not recommended to unzip’ were subsequently sent. Finally some documents were sent in relation to one partner (West Mamprusi GES) but all related to period prior to 2011/12 the year under review and did not bring the work with this

¹⁶⁴ Ghana Country profile exercise completed 12/2010 when Ghana has already attained MIC status

¹⁶⁵ In 2012/13 VSO has bid as part of a consortium with 9 partners, to DFID for a grant of £6M

¹⁶⁶ with 85% of this figure provided by the DFID PPA

¹⁶⁷ These budget projections vary; Ghana office figures show 31% of a budget of £1,975,729; VSO 24% of a budget of £2,053,780 – if DFID SGA allocation to Ghana has been cut the Finance team in country do not seem aware of this. The expected fall in DFID proportion of 2012/13 budget also depends upon programme capacity to reabsorb in this year considerable underspends in early years of Comic Relief TENI funding.

¹⁶⁸ Rachel Campbell a Teacher Support Officer

¹⁶⁹ Cadbury, Comic Relief, John Basson & PSO

¹⁷⁰ Finance staff were not sure of the proportion

¹⁷¹ Lacking at least 2 of the key partnerships in the Cadbury funded programme; including several partners where VSO has decided not work, eg. Special Education Division of Ghana Education Service, whilst not colour coding these as such

¹⁷² And two differing sets of figures for 2011/12 were provided by London

partner up to date. Unnecessary expense was incurred¹⁷³ and it was inefficient for the evaluator to be accompanied on many field visits by 2 programme staff, and at times a third member of partner staff, whose participation in meetings with partners/beneficiaries was previously explained as undesirable. The newly branded VSO is not yet consistent in Ghana – old headed notepaper is still in use, and in Tamale an old logo road sign is still in place. Cost savings are expected from the move to Bolgatanga to Tamale; this may well allow VSO to reduce rent costs.¹⁷⁴

Many insufficiencies were explained by the programme having been understaffed although all posts in the normal chain of command were filled and this should be sufficient to provide both direction and oversight¹⁷⁵. The issue appears to be one of performance rather than posts as there are instances where the team's own capacity appears to have been weak.

In the first 6 months of TENI a struggle with the logframe and targets was hard
Project Manager TENI

This seems to indicate that the team is not used to managing logframes and result based reporting and the quality of the ACR also shows this. The ACR reports however that almost all donor reports were submitted on time and this is positive, except for the Cadbury Cocoa Project where there was an agreement to submit after the year end. VSO own internal reporting (ACR) was delivered late after a 10 day extension period was exceptionally granted.¹⁷⁶

Step 3: development of individual partnership plans

No - there is no one tool that the organisation guides staff to use to assess organisational capacity.
Regional M&E Manager

The theory¹⁷⁷ says that

- VSO partners undertake a Guided Self-Assessment Process to explore their strengths and capacity development priorities (*i.e. taking time to learn*)
- The G-SAP process informs what goes into the Partnership Plan with VSO
- G-SAP scores and targets are used in the Annual Partnership Review to explore how things have improved (*i.e. understanding the change*)
- The Partnership Plan is updated annually based on new priorities that emerge from the Annual Partnership Review (*i.e. ongoing learning*)

¹⁷³ in the quality of hotel accommodation chosen and the intent to provide a day room during the final day of evaluation when this would not have been used

¹⁷⁴ No data to substantiate this checked

¹⁷⁵ Assistant or Acting CD in post 12/2010 to 08/2012; backed up by RD (since May 2009) 01/2011 to 11/2011 and this same person in country as Acting CD 11/2011-07/2012. The new RD has been in post and shares the same office since 09/2011

¹⁷⁶ Assistant Country Director reported not having been aware of the need to complete this. Not clear why former RD Acting as Country Director at the time did not complete – delay and poor quality confirmed by Regional M&E manager

¹⁷⁷ Taken from Holistic model for helping partners learn and change – Powerpoint presentation

I was also shown the templates and explanations of organisational assessment tool used for education and livelihoods; data capture sheet to be used for tracking Guided Self Assessment process indicators. In Ghana CUSO specifically provided some resources so that those volunteers who wished to use the CUSO/VSO Paths to Partnership (that is a lengthy document and contains a variety of capacity assessment methods/diagnostic processes) could try out tools and learn from capacity assessment. This is not however a substitute for programme staff conducting some form of capacity assessment prior to the placement of a volunteer in order to inform the emphasis and duration of a potential partnership.

Despite the M&E Manager's assurance that "I have witnessed capacity assessments by a team of volunteers put together by VSO Ghana then called the G-SAP Committee in 2010 using these tools" I could not find a body of evidence (completed results) that shows these systems and processes are used for assessing partner capacity, establishing timeframes for partnerships – as opposed to the length of any one individual volunteer placement – and reviewing the impact from investment of the volunteer annually. The paper trail for the partners visited was in every case incomplete. I made considerable effort to follow the paper trail for West Mamprusi District Ghana Education Service (GES) office since this partner is a key partner in the TENI programme; had received OD assessment designed to lead to a capacity building plan; and was one of 19 partners submitting data via an annual partner review – thus providing at least some stepping stones in the partnership trail.

West Mamprusi District Education Office undertook an organisational assessment process (late 2009 – early 2010) facilitated by VSO Organisational Development volunteers and the published report¹⁷⁸ of this process was shared. One thing is striking, the reference to the 52% cut in funding from Government experienced by the GES in 2009 and this must have a profound impact upon capacity. I have not seen a Development Plan, which this document indicates as the next step to address the capacity issues identified through the assessment process. VSO did supply a Management Support Officer¹⁷⁹ and a Teacher Support Officer¹⁸⁰ but whose final report indicates frustration at the fact that she worked more as an MSO than on supporting teachers in classroom methodologies as expected.

No partnership plan has been seen; no placement objectives for the MSO role have been seen; a report from an annual partner review meeting (March 2010) was shared and this indicates improved attendance by both GES staff, teachers in schools and students which is positive. The PMLT completed for West Mamprusi GES in February 2012 states that volunteer inputs have been provided to improve organisational management and systems and that 80% of intermediate beneficiaries have applied the knowledge and skills acquired. Explanation of these improvements is exactly the same as the detail given in the March 2010 APR workshop report; therefore there is no evidence for additional impact from the further 2 yrs of work invested in this partner. And the 80% figure seems to have been chosen by the Programme Manager who completed the exercise – it is unclear why 50% or 100% was not chosen. No exit strategy has been seen despite this partner being associated with an externally funded programme that has only 1 complete year to run.

I conclude that this step in the value chain is not effective. Tools which exist are lengthy and frequently not used. VSO desperately needs a simple diagnostic framework to systematically assess the key elements of capacity in a way that will highlight whether providing skills or work on systems through volunteers is really likely to improve capacity.

¹⁷⁸ Organisation Assessment of West Mamprusi Ghana Education Service office March 2010

¹⁷⁹ Leticia Apilado said to have served 11/2009-10/2011 but no reporting to show this has been seen and the other volunteer report refers to issues with this volunteer that were poorly managed

¹⁸⁰ Charlotte Cashman 09/2009 – 07/2010

*I realised volunteers want to commit to one year of service.
Most of our jobs cannot be done in 3 months, the change will hardly be noticeable*
Geographic Programme Manager

There is also a need to clarify how selection of the best type of volunteer for the job is actually made. This comment illustrates clearly how the landscape has changed since this staff member joined the organisation, when he first joined most Placement Descriptions were for 2 years and indeed the majority of requests still are. Many volunteers were found to be returning after just one year of service or declaring at In Country Training that they only wanted to stay for one year so now “we opted for 1 year and then if it works well they are likely to extend.” Short term Ranstaad volunteers bring teaching and learning materials so GES accepts them and “we go in for that to get the material.” It may be that this individual’s approach to volunteer selection is not the norm however the comments give rise to concerns about efficiency and economy.

Step 4: VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans

Principal responsibility for this link in the value chain lies elsewhere with VSO Ghana effectively the customer. In 2011/12 there were 43 Volunteer arrivals (39 LT and 4 ST), against 59 planned – a 73% fill rate. There were 2 early returns (5%) citing medical reasons. Volunteers met seem enthusiastic, committed and dedicated to the jobs they found themselves doing, even where this was not as described in placement documentation pre arrival. For example volunteer at Presbyterian Agricultural Training Centre who is largely unable to develop a production unit as a source of revenue for the organisation because of the organisation’s limited funds and cash flow problems; and is unable to treat the animals belonging to farmers’ groups that he is expected to help boost livestock production, since his Ugandan veterinary assistant qualification does not allow him to practice in Ghana. Both these constraints are the responsibility of the programme office – to have correctly identified the partner capacity constraints and to understand any issues about transferable qualifications and skills.

Step 5: Volunteers work with partners in country

Placement objectives for all the volunteers visited were not provided by the programme office; some volunteers brought their own documentation to discussions and this was useful. One unique feature of the Ghana programme was the Joint Induction Meeting (JIM) that is supposed to be held after 8-12 weeks in post. This is to allow for adjustments to placement descriptions to be made once the volunteer has settled in. On the one hand this is sensible where the recruitment process has been lengthy and partner needs may have changed. On the other explanations given about this process (by staff and several volunteers) gave me the feeling that previous volunteers have often played an unusually strong role in providing information re gaps and resource availability in existing partnerships and thus making considerable input to placement descriptions without staff (whose responsibility it is) independently verifying this analysis. Secondly this tips the balance in favour of the relationship between volunteer and programme office and weakens the ‘partnership’ between VSO and Ghanaian organisations. Thirdly, in some cases, volunteers with strong opinions about their expertise and interests have used the JIM to refocus the placement description and diverts from the stated aim of responding to needs identified by partners.

Step 6: Partner organisations are strengthened sustainably

VSO has the potential to achieve this. The business development volunteer placed with the Guinea Fowl Farmers Association (GUFFA) is “definitely a good match to our requirements.” In post since December 2011 this volunteer has provided training for members on simple record keeping linking this inputs/profit related data to a system of member records that will track both growth in the membership base of the organisation and results of individual businesses. In turn this will, by the end of the first year of capturing data, allow the GUFFA to track ‘star farmers.’ This fits well with their vision and current way of working where farmers are encouraged to specialise in niche areas of this value chain, with some focusing on brooding stage, others on growing young pullets, others on fattening. This matches the right people to the most delicate (or risk intense) parts of the chain at the same time allowing for overall expansion in production to meet a constantly growing demand for a product that is highly desired (for its low cholesterol content) and being gender neutral is raised by 90% of households. Both men and women keep fowl as a hobby and there is enormous potential for this to become a productive business and income stream. The volunteer’s approach, business background and simple systems were highly appreciated by members, board members and Project Officer so although too early to say, it seems likely that they will continue to be used by members and the organisation after the end of this one year placement. This isolated example was heartening and there were several factors that are likely to sustain improvements: the organisation is a membership based organisation with minimal core operating costs and just one staff member; all other resources in part derived from member subscriptions are directed at collateral for loans or welfare support for members; GUFFA is supported by at least 3 other technical partners¹⁸¹ as well as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture.

In fact GUFFA provides a perfect example of the key aspects that should be considered in every capacity assessment. It operates in a favourable **external environment** (where there is both a wide base for increased production, unmet demand, and support from authorities); they have enough **resources and skills** although these are minimal they are well oriented; the leadership has clear **vision and strategy**. The volunteer fits the right need in helping to develop **systems** that will allow the organisation to capitalise and best use its resources (in the form of the members and their skills) to address their vision - that is for households to generate additional income through a value chain approach to guinea fowl production and sales.

Other areas of capacity picked up within livelihood partner reviews refer only to capacity for networking.¹⁸² The ACR does not mention any findings, results or learning about increased partner capacity nor offer any appreciation of whether this differs between Government and non Government partners. I conclude that since assessment of initial capacity is so rarely made¹⁸³ and Annual Partner reviews conducted for just 19/50 partners VSO cannot show that partner capacity has been strengthened. Some kind of post placement review would be necessary to find the extent to which any such gain is sustained since as one partner mentioned “once the interventions stop then they relax” and there is a drop in performance.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ GTZ, Trias Ghana (Belgian), Trade-Aid (LNGO)

¹⁸² Master Data set of results information used to inform VSO AR to DFID

¹⁸³ ACR states only that CPPA funds were used to conduct Guided Self Assessment Processes with 6 organisations

¹⁸⁴ Interview with GNECC

Step 7: As a result: strengthened partner organisations are better able to deliver quality basic services and hold Government to account

The ACR checks this dimension of change but does not supply evidence for this. During this review I did not find any additional evidence that Ghanaian partners of VSO are able to better able to hold Government to account.

The work on education provides some qualitative evidence about positive changes from those interviewed:

- ✓ The volunteer (working on INSET training for Science teachers) is bringing the idea of improvisation; lots of lessons are now practical
- ✓ We learned something on fractions, when you go back there is an impact at class level
- ✓ One teacher from Bolga Technical Institute noted an improvement amongst students from nil passes in Science (2008) to 66% passing (2010)
- ✓ Ghanaian language materials have been provided through TENI
- ✓ Community involvement: when an NGO who doesn't even know me comes to help you ask yourself what is my role
- ✓ There are enhanced regular meetings of the District Oversight Committee
- ✓ Challenges are being thrown to parents/PTAs who now meet with GES or the District Assembly about school infrastructures
- ✓ All politicians are involved now and a sense of competition between communities is being injected

In other areas it is less clear that attribution can be made to VSO efforts

- We use women themselves as role models to build girls up in education (citing Action Aid as promoter)
- We have revamped Sarah clubs (in school clubs for girls)
- We received Teacher learning materials from LINK
- Ghana Education Trust Fund and Action Aid built us buildings

In summary there are some positive indications from target community members that the education services provided to their children may indeed be beginning to improve although this does not yet consistently translate through to improved results and is not always due to VSO interventions. There was some anecdotal information on awareness about the need to educate girl children and to discourage early marriage; but pupil registration numbers (by gender) from the two districts visited does not yet show any consistent trend in terms of a year on year increase in girl students registered (numbers fluctuate from one year to another) and whilst in some years where there is an overall increase girls registered outpace boys, in other years the reverse is true.¹⁸⁵

Impact and value for money of PPA funding

SGA funding has mostly been used to fill gaps in the budget covering costs of staff providing general support for the whole programme and covering costs of volunteers. 'Unrestricted' funds provided through the DFID SGA covered 28 % of the Programme Office budget in 2011/12 and were used to cover 39% of total staff costs; 54% of total office costs; 59% of total Volunteer costs; and 0.9% of total Programme costs.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Own analysis of results data from GES District Planning and M&E Officers

¹⁸⁶ Data provided by Finance team; overall contribution from London figures

Cost recovery from Ministry of Education has been very low only covering accommodation. Until 2008 education volunteers were paid at a rate equivalent to local teachers but with a ban on recruitment of teachers imposed as an element of World Bank conditionality, and with VSO moving to placing Education Management Advisors in non-established posts this has ceased. All other volunteer costs have to be covered from restricted funds raised or from the core DFID grant in absence of this.

Concluding Remarks

There are several links in the VSO Value Chain where critical weaknesses compromise delivery of the impact expected as suggested by the VSO Theory of Change. The strategic analysis of needs and targeted focusing of this programme are weak. The absence of simple, systematic analysis of partner capacity means that providing a volunteer as a response has some chance of improving overall capacity but possibly an equal chance of failing to do so. The organisation needs to develop clear partnership plans and an effective way of judging outcomes, including for community level beneficiaries, if it is to become able to demonstrate development impact.

Annex G3: Country programme report 3: Laos

Assessed and written by Willem van Eekelen

Assignment

This assessment is part of a mid-term evaluation of VSO's Strategic Grant Agreement. The assessment took a week.

Wednesday Sept 26	Conversations at CUSO-VSO's Vientiane office, about the evaluation plans, the CUSO-VSO's Laos context and strategy, and the country office's systems, policies and processes. Visit to HJA and to training centre where a new group of national volunteers was being trained.
Thursday Sept 27	Meetings at the Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office (PAFO) of Salavan, Nongdeng Centre and in Bungsay, a target village.
Friday Sept 28	Meetings at Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Extension Services (PAFES) of Sekong and in Songkhon, a target village.
Saturday Sept 29	Meetings at PAFO/PAFES Champasak, and an agricultural laboratory visit.
Sunday Sept 30	Interview with former HJA national volunteer.
Monday October 1	Interviews with volunteer and staff of Learning House, and with representatives of Women Rights Study Association, the Laos Association for PLWHA and Helvetas.
Tuesday October 2	Meetings at Cord and lunch with the Director and the volunteer of the iNGO Network; debriefing to the Country Representative and team.

I would like to thank Tim and his team for this exceptionally smooth-flowing and well-organised week. Many thanks to Ouee in particular, for the days he spent with me and for the many hours we spent talking-while-driving. And thanks to Sawai for his patient translation, Khamla and Touk for their support, and the many people who were kind enough to talk with me and show me things.

This report follows the standard IPR structure, which is the same for all 40 organisational reports that are being prepared in the context of DFID's 'Programme Partnership Arrangement' (PPA).

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

Coffey on the performance assessment against logframe

The extent to which grantees [this is VSO] have delivered on outputs and achieved the changes indicated in their logframes. In the first annual review this will largely assess outputs, while subsequent reviews will be able to increasingly assess outcomes. The assessment will be of the whole organization or of the part of an organization's programme covered by the PPA.

CUSO-VSO Lao has carefully considered the best way to measure the immediate and ultimate beneficiaries for each volunteer placement. This was not easy, because many of the beneficiary numbers were estimated prior to the actual volunteer deployment.¹⁸⁷ Inevitably, some volunteer roles turned out to be different from what had been envisioned when the beneficiary numbers had been estimated. For example, staff at PAFO Salavan has been less interested in engaging with the volunteer than envisioned, which means that the group of immediate beneficiaries is slightly lower than predicted.

These are exceptions, and in its entirety the logframe numbers are meaningful and roughly in line with how reality turned out to be. Moreover:

- CUSO-VSO Lao has carefully documented the choices and assumptions that underpin the measurements. This measurement protocol will help to ensure that the office’s longitudinal measurements are comparable. Other VSO offices could learn from this.
- The numbers are admirably conservative. For example, the measurement protocol in relation to a national volunteering project stipulates that “the most accurate estimation [is] to count only the heads of the community as the ultimate beneficiaries [...]” Other offices would have counted the entire village population.
- CUSO-VSO Lao has accurately aggregated the numbers of individual placements into a country-wide overview.¹⁸⁸

Recommendation 1

Other VSO offices could learn from the way CUSO-VSO Lao has measured the number of its immediate and ultimate beneficiaries, and from the way CUSO-VSO Lao has developed a protocol that will inform future logframe measurements.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Coffey on ‘improving lives’

An assessment of the extent and the manner of changes in the lives of poor and marginalized people as a result of the changes achieved, and the extent to which these changes are likely to be sustained. It is recognised that agency reporting in this area is likely to be illustrative of changes, rather than comprehensive across the portfolio.

¹⁸⁷ Sometimes the unknowns were very significant indeed - up to the point of not yet knowing if a volunteer was going to focus on a seeding or on a livestock breeding project. In a few cases – the placement at the Civil Society Consortium Programme, for example – the baseline and target numbers have yet to be developed (see the sheet titled *basic summary beneficiaries PAR 11-12*).

¹⁸⁸ A note on file naming: it is good practice to end file names with the date in reverse (yymmdd), to ensure that the most recent version is easily found. The current titling practice (*revised GRID-Livelihoods* instead of *GRID-Livelihood 110408*) risks people looking at outdated documents versions.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups

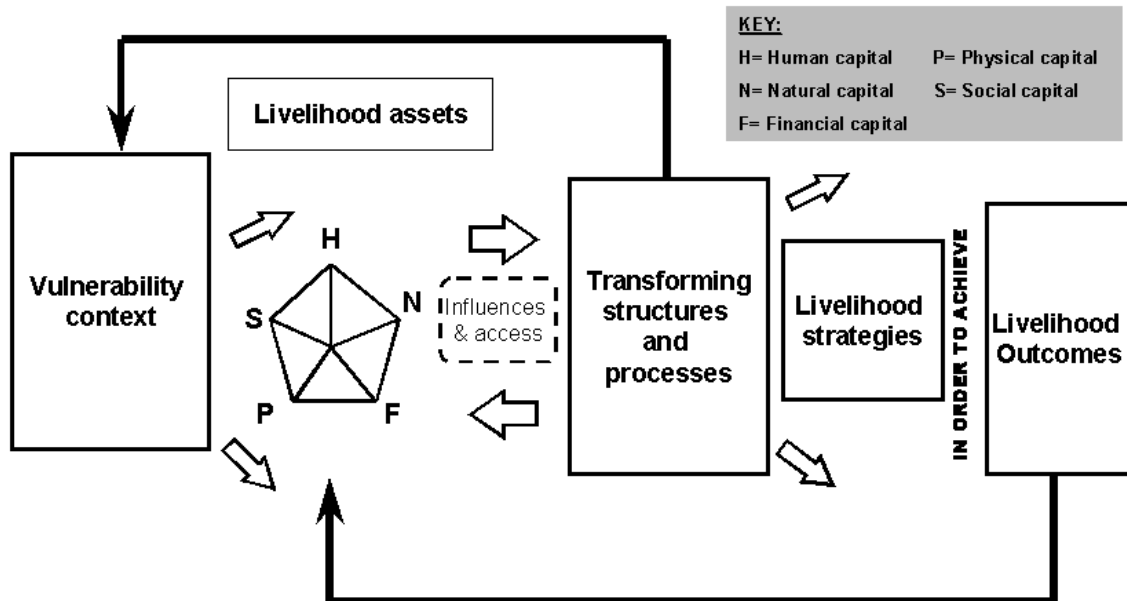
Lao's agricultural sector receives support from many different organisations. CUSO-VSO Lao, too, is experimenting with goats, rice and mushrooms, and the volunteers who run these experiments are the only ones who engage directly with poor and marginalised communities. They implement these projects through governmental Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office service providers (PAFOs) and the objective is to have a direct impact on the income and food security of people from the target group. This impact could be direct or in the future, and the target group could be the direct beneficiaries as well the communities in which these beneficiaries live. I cover the options in turn.

Immediate impact on beneficiary families. I saw some evidence of increased and diversified assets and income, but the impact is not (yet) profound. A group of farmers is indeed piloting organic rice cultivation, for example, but:

- the scale of the experiment is small;
- farmers seem to cooperate at least in part because the PAFO – which is government, and therefore powerful – tells them to;¹⁸⁹
- the enthusiasm amongst the farmers is limited, even though the yield of the organic plots outperform the yield of the conventional plots;
- although the PAFO expressed interest in scaling up the trials to other districts, it does not seem eager to continue the project beyond the stay of the volunteer without the allowance that the volunteer's counterpart currently receives, and additional project support funds that will no longer be paid;
- a similar project that has been implemented a few years ago imploded soon after the volunteer had left; and
- the projects only address a very small part of the complex livelihoods of poor Lao farmers. Within a typical livelihood framework (next page), the projects only cover a bit of 'H' (the training) and a small part of the 'P' (assets such as goats or rice, which then adds to the income gained with a combination of forest harvesting, fishing and working on other people's land.) Such an isolated intervention is unlikely to lift people out of poverty.

While it is understood that this project is a small pilot that was started to test production techniques under farmer conditions, chances that this type of cultivation continues beyond the presence of the volunteer seem modest. The implication is that I do not wholeheartedly support the suggestion, made by many, that the PAFO-placed volunteers should have project budgets. It *might* work, but it may very well not have much impact, and project funding would make it even harder for volunteers to play an embedded role within the PAFO, rather than merely to implement an isolated project.

¹⁸⁹ This seems to be a recurrent theme. In the PAFO Sekong, too, the volunteer felt that the authority of the PAFO facilitated his village-based work.



A typical sustainable livelihoods framework (this one comes from DFID, 1999)

Longer term impact on the beneficiary families. The results of livestock projects in particular could potentially mushroom (e.g. two goats lead to 20 and 200 goats). It is too early to assess if this happens. To increase the chances, the volunteer ensures that the families involved receive training related to goat health and breeding. Another chance-enhancing strategy could be to involve local people who have a successful breeding record. Upon my request, the families in one village introduced me to a man who had only 2 cows a few years ago, and now has 20. It might be possible to get people like this man to coach the beneficiary families. This might require providing an achievement-based incentive, such as £X per goat that is owned by one of the beneficiary families after five years.

Impact in the wider community. Around the world new crops get introduced into regions where they prove to outperform existing crops, and take their place. I have not seen evidence of CUSO-VSO Lao projects having such ripple effects.¹⁹⁰

Effects on civil society

CUSO-VSO Lao envisages “a strong civil society with a network of Non Profit Associations (NPAs) that is effectively addressing the needs of some of the most vulnerable and marginalized social groups in Lao.” This is a bold vision in a country in which organised civil society exists in embryonic form only.

CUSO-VSO Lao contributes to achieving this vision in close cooperation with a range of stakeholders. Together, they represent or support a sector that is small, young and basic. The NPAs that populate this sector face many barriers. Registration processes are long, tedious and ambiguous; funding is hard to arrange and may take years to materialise;¹⁹¹ English language skills are in short supply but crucial for grant access; the operational environment is often indifferent or hostile; the donor

¹⁹⁰ The only and very minor exception is that two people replicated mushroom farming after CUSO-VSO introduced it in a village. I have not visited this village. I have also not been able to visit the ‘floating wheat’ project, which Tim believes has most multiplier potential.

¹⁹¹ A striking example: SDC was eager to support the Civil Society Consortium Programme ever since 2009, but it took until 2012 for its Headquarters to approve the funding (\$774k over three years.)

community was disjointed until the SDC consortium idea brought them together;¹⁹² and well-qualified staff is nearly impossible to recruit because the UN, iNGOs and mining sectors are able to pay much higher salaries.

Supporting these NPAs is such a very sensitive affair that even the terminology is Lao-specific and carefully non-confrontational. It would be offensive to be 'non-governmental' so local NGOs are called Non Profit Associations; iNGOs do not 'strengthen' NPAs but 'develop' them; and CUSO-VSO Lao calls its civil society programme a 'livelihoods programme.' iNGOs have to tread carefully or face closure, as happened with the Australian Volunteers International, when the organisation became too explicitly engaged in Lao civil society. The CUSO-VSO Lao volunteers who are in civil society placements are unable to get work permits,¹⁹³ and some have to leave the country every month. CUSO-VSO Lao believes it would not be able to work in the civil society sector without also deploying a number of volunteers to government institutions. Advocacy work must be very 'soft' and in the context of inter-agency working groups rather than as stand-alone initiatives.

However, an altogether different picture emerges if one steps away from the day-to-day and even month-to-month frustrations, and looks at the time frame of a few years:

- Laos signed up to the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness,¹⁹⁴ which means that it formally committed to "encouraging the participation of civil society and the private sector." Laos also signed up to the Accra Agenda for Action, which means that the Lao Government committed to "work with CSOs to provide an enabling environment that maximises their contributions to development."
- Follow up on this Declaration and Agenda for Action is cautious, but very clearly noticeable. In 2009, the Lao Government introduced the first-ever legislation around NPAs and this made it possible, in principle, for NPAs to exist formally. In 2010, the government modified its more cautious 2005 legislation related to iNGOs. From 16 to 19 October 2012, Vientiane will even be the scene of an international civil society event, when the city hosts the 9th Asia-Europe People Forum ([AEPF9](#)).
- These are not just empty gestures: the number of iNGOs went up from some 20 in the 1990s to almost 100 today, and there is a gradually increasing number of NPAs that has registered or is in the process of registering. Prison is no longer the threat it once was for people who are actively involved in civil society development, and the government even tolerates a Learning House that effectively serves as an NPA incubator. Soon, the country will have its first-ever tripartite MoU, signed by an iNGO, an NPA and a government body.¹⁹⁵ Some argue that the NGO community is lagging behind and is imposing a higher level of self-censorship than is required in today's political environment.

In this very early stage of the country's civil society development, the role of CUSO-VSO Lao has been very significant indeed. This role takes three forms:

¹⁹² There used to be significant overlaps in training. Even just the development of the proposal for the Civil Society Consortium Programme led to efficiency gains as, for example, it caused Cord and SNV to discover that they were both going to conduct a capacity assessment of the same NPA.

¹⁹³ One volunteer lamented the lack of formal status and the need to lie: "when I presented myself during meetings, I used to say that I was an 'aid effectiveness consultant.'" This lack of formal status is not a big problem as long as the Lao Government does not want it to be a big problem – but it is not nice either.

¹⁹⁴ There is also a Lao-specific version of this declaration in the form of the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

¹⁹⁵ Helvetas, PADETC and the Gender Division of the Ministry for Agriculture and Forestry.

- **Support to create civil society.** CUSO-VSO Lao has spun off a few NPAs that are becoming increasingly visible as independent organisations. These organisations are still small and fragile, but they are also some of the country's earliest NPAs, with clear and attractive remits, increasing visibility, and – partly thanks to the work of CUSO-VSO Lao - confident and competent leaders.¹⁹⁶
- **Support to coordinate civil society's work.** CUSO-VSO Lao supports coordination and cross-fertilisation amongst both national and international NGOs by strategically placing volunteers in umbrella organisations. CUSO-VSO Lao currently has one in the Learning House (which hosts and supports a range of NPAs), one in the iNGO Network, and one in the Civil Society Consortium Programme.¹⁹⁷ Because civil society is so young, intelligent design might be able to prevent common problems from occurring, with the sector. For example: the CUSO-VSO Lao volunteers are working to develop a culture where a single report is acceptable to multiple donor agencies – oh, how much time would be saved if this is going to be the norm!¹⁹⁸
- **Develop civil society staff.** Through HJA, CUSO-VSO Lao supports the development of a new pool of national NPA professionals. Most of the volunteers that are currently in training (I met all 13 of them) would not have entered the sector without this volunteering programme,¹⁹⁹ and they are ready to make a difference and enthusiastic about the things they think they will learn.²⁰⁰ I interviewed a first-generation alumni volunteer as well, and found that he still works in the NPA sector, rather than in his father's hotel-restaurant (which was his contingency plan). This suggests that HJA's work does indeed add to the civil society staffing pool.²⁰¹

At first glance and in two ways, the intensity of support seems disproportional to the size and work of Lao's civil society sector:

1. *Disproportionality within the organisations.* For years and without clear exit plans, CUSO-VSO Lao provides a sequence of full time volunteers to organisations that only have one or very few staff members. This makes an outsider wonder for how long one could 'build the capacity' of one or a few people, and to what extent the fruits of all these efforts are lost when these people leave their organisations.
2. *Disproportionality across the organisations.* I heard of inter-agency meetings where four out of the eight attendants were CUSO-VSO Lao staff and volunteers; and in practical terms the three volunteers at the Learning House, the iNGO Network and the Civil Society Consortium Programme are each other's primary counterparts.

The practical implication is that the volunteers often play key rather than supporting roles within the organisations they serve. Nathalie covers the NPA and other external contacts of the iNGO Network,

¹⁹⁶ The same pattern emerges amongst the international volunteers: several of them are still in Laos, or in Laos again, where they now fulfil senior iNGO positions.

¹⁹⁷ More accurately: CUSO-VSO's volunteer at the Learning House has just finished her assignment, and her replacement has not been identified yet; and CUSO-VSO's volunteer at the iNGO network will finish her assignment shortly after this month's AEPF9.

¹⁹⁸ Donor education is part of this effort, and the Civil Society Consortium Programme is helping NPAs to develop an agenda to inform 'good practice' workshops with donors (Output 2.1.3 of Outcome 2). It is not often that local civil society advises international donor agencies on the way they could best approach their work – it is generally very much the other way around!

¹⁹⁹ E.g. 'Without this programme I would help my parents on the land.'

²⁰⁰ 'What is the advantage of being a volunteer? We will get an open mind, learn, get encouragement. We will learn to speak in public, learn to do team work. We will participate in community development and use this training to help people.'

²⁰¹ CUSO used to have a system of national volunteers. CUSO-VSO scrapped this system. Considering the acute civil society staffing needs, this seems to be an important loss.

and has at one point been the only person working for the network. Nenette has spent the best part of 2012 as the only person working for the Civil Society Consortium Programme, setting up systems in anticipation of a Project Manager who assumed his duties nine months after Nenette arrived in Laos.²⁰² Without Nenette hunting for reports from the organisations that receive SDC funding under this scheme, reporting defaults would have been common and the programme's future might have been at risk. When Nenette is worried about the Learning House's financial reporting, she phones Lis, the volunteer, to sort it out.

In the longer run, volunteer positions should not be so key to the core operations of these organisations. However, for now, this seems required to keep these organisations alive and on a growth path. Essentially: in absence of these volunteers the networks may not have died but would probably have not developed quite as fast as they did – and these first years of civil society development are not a good time to lose momentum.

I do not know what the future holds. I can imagine that, 20 years from now, there is a thriving civil society. It also seems altogether possible for Laos' civil society to disappear again, if NPAs upset the government into a clamp down. In case of the former scenario, CUSO-VSO Lao will have played a major role in Laos' first stage of civil society development, and the potential fruits of that seem to be well worth the risk of failure.

Recommendation 2

From other country visits I gathered that VSO, as an international development organisation, is at its most powerful when creating something new. The Lao assessment confirms this: the organisation's various contributions to the country's new civil society sector are key to this sector's development.

Ideally, this ability to innovate should drive programme choices. Within the limits of Lao's sensitive political environment (and the team is much better able to judge what is and is not possible than I am) I can imagine that there might be opportunities for:

- moving volunteers ('who needs HR support?');
- placements in the larger civil society organisations (rather than focusing exclusively on CUSO's spin-off organisations); and
- supporting the government in its efforts to live up to the various international conventions that Laos has signed up to.

Relevance

Representativeness

Coffey on representativeness

The degree to which the supported civil society organisations represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies (including where relevant the poorest and most marginalized). This will include an assessment of whether the planned interventions, as described in the logframe, continue to respond to these needs and priorities.

²⁰² This very early involvement – six months before the contracts were signed between the lead agency (Cord) and the consortium members – was risky, but also a key opportunity for CUSO-VSO to get engaged right at the centre of this new programme, and to provide much-needed support during 'start up.'

I have been very impressed by VSO's volunteers. They tend to be driven, pro-active, intelligent, creative and well-informed. That notwithstanding: international volunteers face formidable cultural and language obstacles, and even the most impressively adaptable volunteer is unlikely to ever be a true and accepted representative of Lao's poor communities. That notwithstanding, there are two very different ways in which CUSO-VSO Lao is working towards representativeness: by placing representativeness on the agenda, and by strengthening the voice of civil society. I cover them in turn.

1. Placing representativeness on the agenda. The provincial agricultural service providers are not traditionally farmer-focused. By means of illustration:

- I have not seen a single farmer in the two extension and research centres I visited, and very limited evidence of extension workers engaging in out-of-centre activities;
- Neither extension centre is currently providing training activities; and
- The employees of the Nongdeng Centre in particular could only very partially explain to me in what way the various activities were meant to benefit the region's farmers.

This contrasted sharply with the volunteers' regular village visits and their community-based seeding and livestock activities. Conceivably, these volunteers could inspire staff to follow suit, but I have seen no evidence of this happening. Rather the contrary: even the volunteers' direct counterparts did not mention community-based work when listing their 'normal' (i.e. non-volunteer-related) responsibilities, and one of the counterparts is probably at least partially driven by a 40,000 Kip (£3.50) allowance per community visit. I am not convinced that the community visits will continue after the volunteers end their assignments, and have not seen evidence of any 'role model effects' that spill over into other projects and activities. Farmer-focused work does not seem to be part of these centres' DNA, and VSO's role models are unlikely to single-handedly change this.

It might be possible to support these provincial role model volunteers at national level. The Lao Government is working to an accountability and anti-corruption agenda, and a combination of strategic support at national level and practical support at province level might help to gradually change the DNA of these service providers. This will not happen by knocking on cold doors – but not all doors are cold. The overall Director of the National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute (NAFRI), for example, has been very supportive of the idea of international volunteer placements in Namxuang and Pakxong, and it may be possible to utilise a recent frustration-fed early departure to persuade him to open the door for national CUSO-VSO support that is geared toward strengthening farmer-focused systems, processes and incentives.

Recommendation 3

Provincial role modelling does not seem powerful enough to strengthen the farmer focus of agricultural service providers. It might be useful to combine provincial support with national support that focuses on strengthening farmer-focused systems, processes and incentives.

2. Strengthening the voice of civil society (and the voice of disadvantaged groups within civil society). The section titled 'Effects on civil society' covers CUSO-VSO Lao work to incubate Lao's young and fragile civil society. In the long run, these NPAs may be able to represent groups that are not heard through Lao's 'mass organisations' and 'youth unions.' There is some early evidence that this might indeed prove to be the case: in the context of the AEPF9, the country conducted its first-

ever province-by-province public consultation process.²⁰³ As part of this process, the mass organisations and a number of NPAs both actively gathered their respective constituents' voices. It was the first time in Lao's modern history that civil society's voice was audible. Some of the momentum this created will slip away after the AEPF9, but some of it will stay, if only because of the need for an NPA to report back, during AEPF10, on the progress Laos achieved in the period from 2012 to 2014.

To a large extent, Lao's civil society is subject to Lao's cultural hierarchy that is based on ethnicity, age, gender and family name. Recognising the implications for the voice of the poorest and most marginalised groups, CUSO-VSO Lao incubated and is still supporting – HJA, an organisation that helps a generation of young women and men from ethnic minorities to develop themselves into NPA professionals (an issue explored in the next section).

Targeting strategy

Coffey on targeting

The extent to which the interventions target the poorest and most marginalized, and the extent to which they target in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit. These targeting strategies are likely to be mutually exclusive, and the assessment will reflect on the way in which the balance between them has been struck. This will include an assessment of whether the targeting continues to be relevant.

At several levels, CUSO-VSO Lao targets carefully and sticks to the choices it makes. This means that partnership suggestions are not always accepted.²⁰⁴ These choices are based on:

- A distribution of poverty and population density across the country;²⁰⁵
- The desire to reach particularly disadvantaged groups, leading to an explicit focus on minority communities;²⁰⁶
- A comparison of options. Climate change, national volunteers, migration issues, pro-poor tourism and a range of other possible foci were all scored on a five-point scale and in a range of dimensions, compared, and chosen from.²⁰⁷

Recommendation 4

When it is time to rethink partnerships, it would be good to add stakeholder mapping to the portfolio of considerations. CUSO-VSO Lao seems inclined to continue existing partnerships - e.g. the NPAs CUSO created years ago, and the PAFOs that CUSO had worked with before – and this may not always be the best possible choice.

²⁰³ On food security, social protection, secure livelihoods and sustainable energy – all very important sectors for CUSO.

²⁰⁴ For example: UNDOC wanted to partner with CUSO-VSO for an alternative livelihoods programme to combat opium production in the north of the country, for example, and CUSO-VSO Lao refused because it did not fit within its strategy (see email from Tim Cook to Russ Cullinane, titled *RE: UNDP relationship- Lao*, on 18 November 2011).

²⁰⁵ See the June 2011 PPP paper, page 4.

²⁰⁶ See the vision statement of the CUSO-VSO Laos strategy, with elaborations throughout the text.

²⁰⁷ See a document titled *Matrix tables in annex and some ref info from strategic choices in June 2011*, pages 7 and 8.

However carefully this targeting is done, it is not always working out: not all partners are necessarily interested in or capable of change, and CUSO-VSO Lao does not always have the final word in the selection of beneficiaries.²⁰⁸ This is inevitable and the office seems to learn from things that do not work out as planned ('I do not think we will work with this PAFO again.')

Often the targeting is spot on, and this is nowhere clearer than in the case of HJA, an organisation that adds to the pool of national NPA professionals by recruiting volunteers from amongst young women and men – where possible from ethnic minority groups.²⁰⁹ This means three things:

1. People from ethnic minorities stand more chance to enter the NPA sector;
2. The placement organisations benefit from language and cultural insights that facilitate work in ethnic minority areas;
3. The volunteers might play a role model function in their respective communities.

Effectiveness

Learning

Coffey on learning

The extent to which grantees learn from their work, and integrate the learning into improved programming, as well as the extent to which others (civil society, governmental and international organisations) make use of this learning in altered policy and practice.

Coffey splits 'learning' into three categories: learning to build an organisation's own capacity, learning for context, and learning to share with other stakeholders. I cover them in turn.

Learning that improves CUSO-VSO's own capacity

Coffey on learning that improves the organization's own capacity: This learning is essentially organizational development for the grantee. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved programming, in the intervention from which it arose and beyond.

The CUSO-VSO Lao office is small, and learning is both informal and ongoing, and framed in systems such as the annual appraisal process, the usual monitoring activities, periodic reporting and the occasional retreat (the last two took place in October 2011 and in September 2012). The logframe-related protocol illustrates that the office's documentation is careful and thorough.

Once the funding pipeline starts to generate results and the Country Representative – Tim – is no longer forced to spend most of his time on grant-related work, it will be much easier to make space for learning, reflection, and the development of systems, policies and processes. The recruitment of

²⁰⁸ I understood that the beneficiaries from Salavan have been selected by the government.

²⁰⁹ The ability to recruit volunteers from ethnic minorities has become increasingly possible, and this illustrates the landmark work that HJA is doing. From an email from the HJA Programme Coordinator, in which she explained the background of a first-generation volunteer who I had met with: "Mr. Nitipida he is not ethnic. He is the first volunteer we recruit in 2007 during that time it is not easy to encourage partner to recruit ethnic youth and women plus to find the right candidate, but our main goal to increase the number of women, ethnic, people with disability each intake."

a fourth member of staff – Ouee – is bound to make all this easier too. He has the right attitude for learning and development: Ouee has been in his role for a mere six weeks, and has already visited most volunteers, refreshed his considerable historical knowledge (he worked for CUSO before), shown responsiveness to field requests²¹⁰ and thought of ways to strengthen CUSO-VSO Lao overall performance.²¹¹

Learning that provides contextual knowledge

Coffey on learning that provides contextual knowledge, essential for good programming: for example learning about the situation of a target population. This learning is largely specific to a particular context and will have little generalizability. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved programming, in the intervention from it arose.

Contextual learning is part and parcel of every placement. Volunteers and their partners say that the Terms of Reference does not always provide sufficient guidance²¹² and that it takes time (up to a year, according to some people) for volunteers to find a way that enables them to contribute to and utilise from their placements to the fullest extent possible.

Recommendation 5

There tends to be significant discrepancy between volunteers' Terms of Reference and the reality they find upon arrival. It might be possible to reduce this discrepancy by initiating a three-way engagement prior to the actual deployment. If CUSO-VSO Laos were to initiate such pre-departure engagement, it would be wise to utilise the services of a professional interpreter, as international telephone communication is difficult enough without massive language issues.

Although there are only a few people working at the office in Laos, there is very considerable historical knowledge as Khamla has worked for CUSO-VSO Lao since 1993 and Ouee first joined the organisation in 2007. Nonetheless – and I have seen this in other parts of the VSO family too – the CUSO-VSO Lao office seems much better in short term contextual learning than in capturing lessons over longer periods of time. I understood that 'PAFO Salavan had the exact same problems ten years ago' – but am under the impression that this has not tangibly impacted on the placement design.²¹³

Recommendation 6

A multiyear partner-specific learning log could help to ensure that learning is not lost over long periods of time.

²¹⁰ Upon a volunteer's request, Ouee started sending volunteers information related to training possibilities, conferences and funding opportunities.

²¹¹ Evaluators are often accompanied by staff members who introduce them to stakeholders and then sit around until the work is done. Not Ouee: he utilised the opportunities of our visits to Salavan, Nongdeng, Sekong and Champasak to the full, doing a great deal of work with X while I was talking with Y. I noticed a volunteer – Somnath – doing the same: we visited a village and halfway the meeting he saw and seized an opportunity to explain something about constructing manure pits.

²¹² A typical example: 'I had expected to work with the Steering Committee on the strategy, but in reality all I could do was to try to place the issue on the agenda. [...] I had expected to build systems, but in reality I did a lot of direct service delivery.'

²¹³ For example: there is still a single primary counterpart. Perhaps a rotating counterpart would be worth trying?

Learning that can be shared with others

Coffey on learning that can be shared with others: for example, improved ways of ensuring participation of marginalized groups. This is learning that can be generalized from the intervention context. Grantees will need to describe their strategy for communicating the learning and the extent to which others took up the learning. Grantees should also use this section to report on their interaction with the Learning Partnership and its four thematic sub-groups and how this interaction affects their capacity to learn and share learning. This type of learning overlaps with innovation.

There is:

- **Sharing with partners.** One of the key advantages of deploying international volunteers is that there is the potential of sharing international good practice with partners that may not be in the position to gather such good practice without external support.
- **Sharing with the country's international development sector.** I have seen an inclination to engage with domestic networks. For example: Khamla maintains excellent relations with government authorities, and sits in NPA boards; Tim is an active member of the iNGO community; Lis maintains a sizeable network; and on quiet days Jose visits other iNGOs' provincial offices.
- **Sharing internationally.** I have not seen evidence of this, though there does seem scope for it. Within VSO International, CUSO-VSO Lao could share its practice of, say, its logframe protocol, and could perhaps learn from countries with a good track record of donor portfolio development. Within the broader international development sector CUSO-VSO Lao could, for example, both learn from and share insights with organisations that support embryonic civil society movements elsewhere in the world

Innovation²¹⁴

Coffey on innovation

The extent to which grantees develop, test, and achieve the adoption by others of new knowledge, such as in techniques, approaches, and design of interventions. Innovation is a special type of learning. It is distinguished from learning in general by novelty.

CUSO-VSO Lao's primary assets are its volunteers' expertise and ability to import international good practice. This renders CUSO-VSO Lao ideally suited for innovative work.

This requires risk-taking and the recognition that innovation is a matter of trial and error. For example, I do not know if CUSO-VSO Lao's work on the civil society sector will succeed or not, but whatever the outcome: it is entirely sound to take calculated risks on the country's first minority-focused volunteering programme, the country's first NPA umbrella organisation, and an iNGO network that is meant to enhance civil society efficiency and to reduce the duplication of efforts. Ultimately, the sum of the benefits of successful innovations is likely to exceed the sum costs of *all* attempts to innovate, and the average benefits are likely to exceed the benefits of small scale and

²¹⁴ Note that the text in this particular section is very similar to the text in the CUSO-VSO PNG country report, where I also found that, for an organisation such as CUSO-VSO, innovation-inspired risks are worth taking.

somewhat repetitive agricultural projects that are implemented in an agricultural sector that is already rather crowded.²¹⁵

Partnership working

Coffey on partnerships

The extent to which partnerships are made with others (civil society, the private sector, governmental and international organisations) that enhance the effectiveness and impact of interventions and encourage sustainability. Partnerships that build sustainability might include:

7. leveraging funds for continuation,
8. securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach,
9. building capacity of southern actors to deliver a service or to monitor service delivery.

In this section I only cover the first two of these three types of partnerships, as the third one is the core of what CUSO-VSO Lao is about, and covered throughout this report.

Leveraging funds for continuation

Over two third of the budget of CUSO-VSO Lao is covered by unrestricted funding,²¹⁶ and the Country Representative faces considerable pressure to access alternative funding streams. The final review will be able to assess the extent of success. For now, all I can assess is:

- The effort. The Country Representative spends most of his time on fundraising.
- The successes. In 2012 CUSO-VSO has secured two sources of programme funding.
- The support. The office has found the RPDFA to be most helpful.
- The pipeline. It is considerable and diverse.²¹⁷
- The possibilities. They exist. Nathalie, a CUSO-VSO volunteer who used to work for a bilateral donor agency, fundraised for AEPF9-related work and secured some £190k from donor agencies in Vientiane and neighbouring Bangkok.²¹⁸

Securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach

I have seen and been impressed with CUSO-VSO Lao's efforts to create facts and synergies within the civil society sector. Beyond this, I have not seen evidence of policy adoption of an intervention or approach, or of significant policy engagement with the Lao Government. It *does* seem possible.

²¹⁵ The PAFOs receive support from IFAD, FAO, ADB, IUCN and the World Bank – and each of them provides both funding and technical expertise. There is repetition within the down-stream projects as well. For example: in the Sekong province it proved difficult to buy goats because another goat distribution project was causing 'goat scarcity.' I lack the expertise and have not seen the project but trust Tim's judgement when he says that the floating wheat project is a possible exception. If the cultivation of floating wheat is replicated widely, then the benefits might outweigh the costs of CUSO-VSO's other agricultural contributions.

²¹⁶ £132,706 out of a total budget of £195,810 in 2011-2012.

²¹⁷ As per a pipeline Excel sheet (*Section B-2 Planning for Unfunded Work*) that was last updated on 31 August 2012: ADB, AusAid, Conservation, Ensemble Foundation, Finnish Embassy, Food and Health Foundation, French Embassy, GIZ, Helvetas, Isle of Man, McKnight, Million Hours Fund, NZAP/VSA, Randstad, UNEP, UNWTO and WFP.

²¹⁸ British Embassy in Bangkok (£10k), EU delegation to Lao PDR (€56k), French Embassy (\$16k), GIZ (€172k) and Oxfam Novib (\$132k).

Action to reduce corruption, cautious action to allow civil society to have a voice: there is clear momentum, and CUSO-VSO Lao should seize the opportunities this momentum presents, creatively and boldly.

Progress is sometimes stalled because of resistance to change within the government, but in other cases it is lack of expertise, or an inability to disentangle the multi-layered obstacles that stand in the way of good governance and accountability. It is CUSO-VSO's challenge to find these latter cases, and offer the Lao Government international volunteers to help find ways forwards.

Recommendations 7

CUSO-VSO has goodwill in Laos, partly because of CUSO's longstanding presence in the country and partly because of CUSO-VSO volunteer deployment to the Institute of Foreign Affairs, PAFOs and NAFRIs. On the basis of this goodwill it might be possible to renegotiate the Framework Agreement that CUSO-VSO has with the Lao Government. If this is indeed possible, then CUSO-VSO's challenge will be to identify and contribute to the areas where the Lao Government's lack of progress is not caused by indifference or resistance, but by lack of expertise.

Sustainability

Coffey on sustainability

Coffey asks evaluators to test the "sustainability hypothesis", which is that "direct service delivery is localised and unsustainable, whereas civil society holding government to account leads to broader and more sustainable results." (Coffey Evaluation Strategy, Annex 4, page 2).

This is not a country where one can 'demand rights' but there are early signs that, one day, civil society might hold parts of the Lao Government to partial account. In preparation for that time, and in addition to engaging in direct service delivery (which is indeed localised and unsustainable), CUSO-VSO Lao builds civil society capacity. As per the recommendation above, it may be possible to contribute to the other part of the rights-based equation too, by supporting capacity building on the side of the duty bearers.

Efficiency and Value for Money assessment

In Coffey's books, 'Value for Money' is achieved by ensuring economy ('doing things at the right price'), efficiency ('doing things the right way') and effectiveness ('doing the right things'). I cover them in turn.

Economy

Coffey on Economy

Relates to the amount of resources or inputs (usually measured in financial cost) which are required to achieve a given output. Fewer – 'cheaper' – resources or inputs represents greater economy (i.e. spending less).

Of all CUSO-VSO country offices, CUSO-VSO Lao has the lowest cost per volunteer. Unsurprisingly, I have not seen any wastage: the staff structure is streamlined and all other costs are modest.

There is careful thinking about the best way to utilise funding. A good example: VSO International had offered CUSO-VSO Lao funding for short term international support, but the Country Representative felt this would not provide the best possible Value for Money and requested that same funding to be used for the recruitment of a Programme Manager instead.²¹⁹

Efficiency

Coffey on Efficiency

The relationship between output, in terms of goods, services or other results, and the resources used to produce them. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs, outcomes and impacts? Could more effects have been obtained with the same budget? In other words 'doing the right things at the right price'.

This office is small and therefore vulnerable to shocks. In 'normal' times the office is flexible, efficient and opportunistic.²²⁰

Outside of the office, inefficiencies are inevitable in a country with a language and culture that is very different from the language and culture of the volunteers, and where some of the partners are more than a little challenging. Even Lis – known in the Learning House as 'wonderwoman' – estimates some 40 per cent time loss because of inefficiencies;²²¹ and Jose, with his pro-active, creative and positive nature, said that his work in the Philippines had 'of course' been much more productive than his work with PAFO Sekong (which CUSO-VSO Lao considers the most effective PAFO the organisation works with). Volunteers often have to *find* work instead of *being approached* for work, and they spend a large portion of their time on issues that are not within their primary field of expertise (e.g. on PowerPoint coaching rather than HR system development). Further time is wasted because of mid-assignment changes in staff.²²²

These are inefficiencies compared to operations in other countries, and are therefore largely irrelevant once the decision to operate in Laos has been made. *Within* Laos, the key inefficiency is that the traditional worldwide organisational VSO *means* are restricting this particular office's ability to achieve its *ends*.

In the section titled 'Effects on civil society,' I mentioned that CUSO's spin-off NPAs were still small and fragile, but had – partly thanks to the work of CUSO-VSO Lao - confident and competent leaders. These leaders say that they still need international volunteers to support them. I suspect that this 'need' relates to a comfort zone rather than to an actual necessity,²²³ and I think the NPA

²¹⁹ As per a February 2012 email from Heather Naylor to Tim Cook.

²²⁰ Opportunistic in the good sense of the word. For example: Khamla has good contacts with the government and sometimes sends letters as the 'Acting Country Director.'

²²¹ Lis was different from most other volunteers in the sense that she compared the investment with the benefits and acted accordingly. This is why she stopped with her English language sessions: because she is not a teacher it cost her too much time to prepare for these sessions, making it poor Value for Money.

²²² In each of the PAFOs I visited, the volunteer's manager had changed in the course of the assignment. In the Learning House, the Steering Committee reshuffled halfway the assignment.

²²³ Several people hinted at this, and the Programme Manager of the Learning House went particularly far: 'We learn from the volunteer, but we might not work as hard as we would without her. [...] We plan less, because

management assumes that the alternative to having a volunteer is *not* having volunteer, rather than having other forms of support instead.

These NPAs need occasional support with English language proposals and reports, guidance as they enter new fields of work, and perhaps some help with marketing and networking. Beyond that, these NPAs do not need volunteers but *money* to transit from small and fragile organisations to mid-sized and stable ones.

Recommendation 8

VSO International emphasises that the organisation is no longer exclusively focused on the deployment of international volunteers. In this context it may be possible to design the Lao office's support on the basis of the office's strategic *goals* rather than the organisation's traditional *means*. In the context of Laos:

- Supporting young NPAs is key to the development of a thriving civil society sector – but a lengthy sequence of international volunteers, placed in tiny NPAs, may not always be the best type of support.
- CUSO used to make yet another contribution to Lao's young civil society sector, in the form of a national volunteering programme. A continuation of this programme would have helped to bolster the NPA sector's very limited pool of able staff, and it may be worth re-introducing it.²²⁴

The lack of cost-sharing might give rise to another possible inefficiency: the volunteer being 'a gift' and insufficiently utilised.²²⁵ The thing is: *nobody* has 'no money': it is all a matter of prioritisation and if an organisation – even a tiny NPA – is unable to contribute *anything* to the cost of a volunteer, then this begs the question if the volunteer is really appreciated and utilised to the full. A staggered introduction of cost-sharing might be a reasonable way forward ('and in year two you will have to cover half the volunteer's accommodation costs').

Recommendation 9

Cost-sharing is a good principle, and a principle that could be used more widely when deploying international volunteers in Laos. This will not be easy: the development culture in Laos is one of 'getting paid' (allowances, funding) and not one of 'contributing' (beyond the often meaningless 'in-kind contributions.')

of these volunteers: we start writing proposals only one week ahead of the deadline, because we know that Lis will sort it out.'

²²⁴ I interviewed and was impressed by one of them: Ms Boutsady, Director of the Gender Development Association. Her story confirms that such national volunteering system creates civil society leaders.

²²⁵ In interviews, people often emphasise that Laos needs 'foreign expertise' – but it struck me that by far the most frequently mentioned volunteer contributions were English language (writing, editing, teaching) and ICT support. Neither service requires the deployment of a foreign professional. Both are fine as by-products that create goodwill and are a little helpful, but in many interviews these were the *only* volunteer contributions that the interviewee mentioned. This disproportionality is reflected in some of the APRs as well: the one for the Institute of Foreign Affairs listed, as the 'main achievements': '110 staff trained in English Language competency based modules'; '72 staff trained in IT'; and 'improved networking and status of IT in the department.' (APR -LA161-Institute of Foreign Affairs- March 2012, Question 9.1, page 31.)

Effectiveness

Coffey on Effectiveness

The extent to which objectives are met. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how far have the project or programme's outputs and impacts contributed to it achieving its objectives? An example would be: did the teacher placement programme improve the quality of the school curriculum or raise achievement?'

CUSO-VSO Lao deploys volunteers to three groups:²²⁶

1. **Government institutions.** The support to the PAFOs and NAFRIs helps a little but the impact is not necessarily sustainable²²⁷ and does not, in its current form, represent the best possible Value for Money. This could change if CUSO-VSO Lao were to have even just one genuine and scalable success (perhaps through low cost innovative trials for *Azola sps* - a floating weed that fixes nitrogen) or were able to link the national policy-making with the provincial work. Currently, CUSO-VSO Lao's national contribution takes the shape of English lessons. This may create goodwill and be of some political importance – but it is not good Value for Money in the conventional sense of the term.
2. **The UN.** The volunteer who is deployed to support a UN 'Small Grants Programme' (SGP) serves a clear purpose and creates synergies that hold benefits for both the UN Environment Unit SGP office and CUSO-VSO Lao. The SGP office have recognised the valuable role the volunteer has played in building the capacity of SGP Office staff, and that of grant recipients to better design implement and monitor small grants effectively. Moreover, the National Coordinator encouraged other CUSO-VSO partners in government and civil society to prepare small grant applications.

CUSO-VSO Lao needs to be aware that another motivating factor of the UN might be the relative low cost of a CUSO-VSO volunteer, compared with the cost of a locally recruited advisor. Extended support of such placement partnerships may displace employment opportunities for Lao professionals and may present a conflict of interest in terms of unduly favouring grant applications from CUSO-VSO partners.

Civil society. The effectiveness of CUSO-VSO's contribution to Lao's civil society is not measurable from month to month or even from year to year. Instead, CUSO-VSO is making a multi-year contribution to building a vibrant civil society sector. There is no way of telling how Lao's civil society is going to develop in the coming years. In a best case scenario, it will become an increasingly meaningful development stakeholder. If this is the case then the handholding in these initial few years represents very good Value for Money indeed.

Annex G4: Country programme report 4: Namibia

Assessed and written by Sue Enfield

²²⁶ Not all placements are filled: 'We suggested a forestry expert, but CUSO-VSO did not get us one.'

²²⁷ Earlier I mentioned an organic rice cultivation project that imploded after the volunteer left. Khamla gave me another example, of good work that had been done in a village that had subsequently been destroyed by a storm. Khamla also mentioned a by-product that I have not assessed: 'some of the people who we were partnering with at the time are now very senior people; one said to me: I learned from you and now I'm a Governor.'

Country Programme Assessment

This assessment is a part of the Strategic Grant Agreement mid-term review of VSO's work. Namibia was selected as one country amongst six, for in depth review since it was implicated early on in the Programme Planning Pilot (PPP) through which country strategy is reassessed and programme direction adjusted accordingly. However in Namibia this process was overtaken by a decision to close the entire programme so a particular focus of interest for the evaluation was to consider how learning from work since the early 1990's had been captured and how exit strategies had been planned and implemented.

I spent the first half day in Windhoek with VSO Namibia staff team, the RAISA Regional Programme Director and a group of Windhoek based volunteers. I then immediately began a programme of visits to partners, selected at random in advance, from education and HIV programmes. Many of these partners Windhoek based although the reach of their work is wider. Over 2 ½ days I travelled to Okahandja, Ondangwa and Kunene regions accompanied by Irene Brendell, Country Coordinator and Exit Manager and some lengthy discussions during these trips were informative and helpful. I was able to meet key staff from all partners, immediate beneficiaries who engaged most closely with the volunteer, volunteers themselves and one group of ultimate beneficiaries (community home based care providers). I would like to thank all who helped me to understand the VSO work in Namibia.

This report follows the standard IPR structure, which is the same for all 40 organisational reports that are being prepared in the context of DFID's 'Programme Partnership Arrangement' (PPA).

Background

VSO has worked in Namibia since the early 1990's when the organisation was invited in by SWAPO as they came to power with independence (March 1990). After protracted struggle to emerge from the apartheid regime the country faced acute skill and manpower shortages, and extremely low levels of basic education and service provision. It soon became clear that the HIV pandemic across Southern Africa was also undermining efforts to build this cadre of educated professionals to work in civil service or non state sector. VSO embarked upon the awareness raising and prevention work that has evolved to become the RAISA (Regional AIDS Initiative of Southern Africa) programme; with the national HIV prevalence rate still standing at 15.3%²²⁸ the effects of this pandemic are far from over.

It seems important to note that between the periods 1991-4 and 2001-4 both the income and the educational attainment components of the HDI have improved, reflecting increases in the household incomes and adult literacy rates. However, a fall in life expectancy is responsible for the value of that index almost halving, and the net result is that the overall value of the HDI declined over the period from 0.607 to 0.557. In other words, the negative impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic (the primary driver of falling life expectancy) is so strong that it more than offsets the positive effects of improvements in other dimensions of human development.

Taken from UNDP HDI trends in Human Development and Human Poverty in Namibia 2007

²²⁸ Globalhealthfacts.org (2007 data)

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

VSO in Namibia was instructed by London not to complete the standard Annual Country Review²²⁹ because they are implementing the exit strategy. Instead a Programme Area Review document was written for the period 2011-12, covering the work on HIV/AIDS and contributing to reporting on progress towards RAISA objectives. This means that for the period under review (2011/12) there is no information on any of the other areas of work²³⁰ or any report on progress against the baseline data that was established for 9 HIV partners in 2011.

It was a waste of resources to have this benchmark and not use it
Staff member's comment

With hindsight the time invested by the Programme Manager, a volunteer used for a specific period to gather data for DFID baseline, the time spent explaining how to gather this to all contributing partners and interpreting and consolidating data²³¹ was wasted. A tangible gap is found in the lack of quantitative results reporting on the work in Namibia within the RAISA report²³² compared to impact and beneficiary data that is included for all other countries.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Step 8: Poor and marginalised people have improved lives

In Namibia sero-prevalence data is only collected amongst pregnant women giving only a partial impression of the epidemic since there is no data for prevalence amongst males and data collected by any of the many VCT clinics is not yet aggregated for national use. However there is clear evidence for the declining prevalence trend amongst 15-19, 20-24 and 25-29 yrs age cohorts from 2002 to 2010.²³³ This is not found amongst 40-44 and 45-49 yrs cohort where the trend is upwards since 2004/2006; this corresponds to the period (2005/6) when community organisations report that ARVs became more widely available and this data shows that people affected at a younger age are surviving and moving into the older age categories.

Namibia is at least able to show declining prevalence amongst population aged 15-24yrs (Impact level indicator VSO logframe). VSO has not collected hard evidence for any impact of its work on HIV but this has been long term (since 1997); cross sectoral (in schools and health facilities; with centrally placed national actors and rather small community groups); and has specifically focused on awareness and prevention activities, and home based care and ART adherence. It seems entirely reasonable to assume there has been some contribution to these positive results at national level. There is also a good attempt to consider output and outcome evidence from volunteer placement reports, and impact where this can really be validated, through a process of peer review.²³⁴ This was encouraging to find and seems to surpass the way in which the PMLT is used to collect quantitative

²²⁹ Interview with staff team

²³⁰ During the period there were 5 volunteers working in education; 4 on disability and 4 on Sustainable Livelihoods.

²³¹ I saw detailed information from one contributing partner (Positive Voices) and this took some time to assemble, and subsequently merge I imagine

²³² Third year (April 2011 to March 2012) report to SIDA June 2012

²³³ Children and HIV and AIDS in Namibia UNICEF

²³⁴ Evidence for change against RAISA objectives (April 2011-2012)

and qualitative data from partners, at least in terms of challenging and discarding some results where there was (as yet) no evidence for change – although of course both processes rely on self assessment and are open to socially desirable reporting.²³⁵ There is also clear distinction made in results at organisational level, for beneficiaries and at policy level – illustrating a good analysis and grasp of VSO Theory of Change.

Some elements of reporting are not so strong. For example RAISA (Southern Africa) review 2011/12 reports that “ART adherence in Malawi and Namibia where VSO RAISA is implementing activities has gone up to 70% and 80% respectively and this is remarkable²³⁶.” RAISA reporting also states “VSO RAISA volunteers have played an important role in both countries especially in counselling for HIV testing so that one could get to know their status and access ART.” VSO has supplied clinical staff to Kunene hospital who trained hospital staff on administering ART in an earlier period (2009) but this seems a rather small contribution from which to be attributing any impact on adherence at national level; the good level of ARV coverage is a prerequisite for adherence and Globalhealthfacts.org indeed confirms ARV coverage of 88%²³⁷ – availability of ART across the country. It is likely that VSO volunteers have made a contribution to improvements in people seeking to know their status (as a result of widespread awareness raising and prevention activities). This alone is an important achievement which it would have been useful to provide some evidence for, rather than to overstate the impact.

Relevance

Representativeness and targeting strategy

Step 1: identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies

The country profile exercise²³⁸ identifies Namibia as a middle income country, but where the Gini coefficient is high such that 10% of the population is said to own 80% of the wealth and Namibia is “the most unequal society in the world”²³⁹. The fragile ecological environment is susceptible to climate change – a particular challenge is water and the recent discovery of a large underground aquifer was being excitedly discussed during my visit. Nevertheless in March 2011 and as part of this global exercise of review of country choices a recommendation is made²⁴⁰ to close the programme. A clear decision is not taken at this point and for some more months the strategic planning process continues to pursue options to work on a programme addressing climate change, HIV/AIDS and gender. Even when closure appears to be an inevitable decision investigation of options to continue to work on HIV/AIDS, managed at distance by the RAISA office in Pretoria²⁴¹ continues for some time.

²³⁵ For example enhanced profile for Galz & Goals is evidenced by media coverage and has led to 3 grants secured and significant interest from another potential donor; in contrast a Strategic Plan and Programme Management performance tool developed for HAMU are outputs but until used, and assuming staff to conduct activities, cannot lead to any outcome. Both examples verified by discussion with partners cited.

²³⁶ These figures were not referenced but were taken by RAISA from UNAIDS Annual Report 2010. Adherence reporting is known to be problematic; percentage figures relate to all those who are on ARV (not all those who may need to be on ARV); commonly self reporting is used and this is often inflated; 95% adherence is optimal to prevent drug resistance.

²³⁷ December 2007

²³⁸ Completed December 2010

²³⁹ UNDP data 2009 quoted in Children and Adolescents in Namibia 2010 UNICEF

²⁴⁰ March 2011 Paper (author Mary Garvey Acting Policy Director)

²⁴¹ As they manage similar work in Lesotho and Swaziland without a programme office

This indecision or delay in applying a policy recommendation appears to come from the tool used. Completing the Country Profile exercise is efficient in that it probably takes just a few hours; but the effectiveness of the tool itself was at the time debated by staff (not just staff in Namibia) because some questions can be subjectively answered; and these results are then interpreted such that countries ranked similarly in terms of LDC/MIC status, cost effectiveness and potential to raise funds in country do not receive the same outcome.

Step 2: identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies

Information still live on the VSO International website states that in Namibia the programme works on education, HIV, disability, sustainable livelihoods and through national volunteering – and oddly does not mention that the programme is going to close. However this was the previous range of sectors, although the partner list (mid 2010) illustrates very few volunteers working in disability or sustainable livelihoods (just 2 per sector); the main emphasis of work is clearly on education and HIV. It was not really clear how in the past potential partners were initially identified. There are some obvious choices – the relationship with Ministry of Education being central to work in education for example. I understand there to have been some snowballing through links and networks allowing for opportunistic exploration of potential partners that amounts really to ‘looking until you find an acceptable partner.’ I have not found any evidence of a mapping and ranking exercise for example a consideration of all potential HIV partners against capacity, areas of intervention²⁴².

There is documented evidence of a preliminary approach to one current partner²⁴³ and this confirms staff explanations of how any partner would be approached at an early stage. Through an exchange about the mission and values of each organisation VSO appears to be looking for shared interests and some shared analysis of needs²⁴⁴. Over time the considerations (what is looked for in a potential partner) seem to have become more structured and comprehensive. Staff would consider the organogram, the existence of a direct counterpart for capacity building, reports and achievements illustrating the story of work done and any impact. No formal capacity assessment tool has ever been used.

During the PPP process which lasted from October 2010 to May 2011, there was considerable time and effort invested into research into 12 areas of potential focus, consultations with partners and volunteers, others (for eg. those in the mining industry and the National Planning Commission), referencing work to national plans²⁴⁵ and needs. As an outcome three options²⁴⁶ are proposed one of which has a clear focus on disadvantaged groups (as directed by People First Strategy) and seeks to influence change building alliances with other partners and with advocacy allies. There is no clear indication of a preferred option suggesting that there will be open discussion within the team and with VSO London about the most sensible way forward.

A decision is earlier made²⁴⁷ to exit the Secure Livelihoods, Disability and Education programmes at

²⁴² Although at this stage of winding up the programme a considerable amount of material has been archived

²⁴³ The Friendly Haven, initial approach made in 2002

²⁴⁴ This is very similar to the early stages of partner identification within for example Oxfam or ADD programming; the distinction is that VSO has volunteers it seeks to place and may accelerate quite rapidly towards commitment to do so

²⁴⁵ National Development plan, Vision 2030, National Health sector framework & poverty indices sourced from Government and non-state sources

²⁴⁶ This paper is undated but I believe was developed by February 2011; entitled Options for Discussion there is no indication of a preferred option suggesting that there will be open discussion within the team and with VSO London about the most sensible way forward

²⁴⁷ November 2010 – note from CD Nicky Matthews to staff

the end of the current volunteers service dates because “these programmes are (or will become) dependent on VSOs unrestricted funds.” This timeline is odd in that a decision to close the education programme was announced and the Programme Manager made redundant a month later, in advance of completing the country profiling exercise which was the basis for the review of global country priorities and ultimately led to closure of the whole programme. In one sense it appears that by deciding to close all areas of work, except HIV that receives external funding through RAISA, and in the absence of a concrete alternative, closure becomes almost inevitable.

Effectiveness

Learning

The rapid progress from decision, to closure of several sector programmes, to redundancy or redeployment of key programme managers and Country Director without any attempt to conduct end of programme evaluations is an enormous loss of learning. It was not clear to me why this was allowed. The education programme exit strategy refers to 20 years of working in the Education sector with VSO seen as a key collaborator in delivering quality education in Namibia. Over the period of the VSO programme²⁴⁸ gross enrolment in schools has remained stable (65-67% amongst 6-24 yr olds) and adult literacy increased markedly (Male from 78 to 85%; Female from 74 to 82%). It is disappointing to find that VSO is not curious about its own contribution to this achievement; nor has it taken stock of the successes and challenges in the different sectors leaving this learning for others who remain. VSO developed a considerable profile through work with disability organisations in Namibia, work that is talked about within the disability movement in Southern Africa and that has influenced in some way the inclusion of the needs of disabled people in HIV communications materials and strategies elsewhere across Africa²⁴⁹. To ‘walk away’ without capturing learning represents a loss of value that would I assume be useful to the organisation in demonstrating its impact and marketing itself to DFID and others.

Innovation

ACR RAISA gives as an example of innovative interventions the focus on Gender and increased number of males in Community and Home based care programmes. This has contributed to reducing the burden of care on women and girls. Whilst unusual this does not address the definition of innovation²⁵⁰ as it does not seem to be either novel (to Namibia or HIV work in general) or involve risk taking. It is happening only on a very small scale; within the community based carers group trained by TKMOAMS (97+) remaining active (23) just 2 are male. I did not find any other examples of innovation in partners visited.

Partnership working

The PPP process has involved partners in discussion programme shape (as per Africa Group strategy “partners and programme participants to be “creators” not just “consumers” of VSO programmes” but the outcome has overridden this consultation and I was unsure how partners actually felt about this.

Exit strategies for live placements were developed post the decision to close the education sector programme and the whole programme once this decision was made final. A process of announcing the decision, discussion with employers and volunteers, sometimes using a capacity assessment to

²⁴⁸ Data taken from UNDP HDI report 2007 and compares 1991 to 2001 data

²⁴⁹ Evaluators own knowledge of cross fertilisation of experiences into Kenya; Rwanda and Handicap International programmes

²⁵⁰ **Coffey on innovation:** The extent to which grantees develop, test, and achieve the adoption by others of new knowledge, such as in techniques, approaches, and design of interventions. Innovation is a special type of learning. It is distinguished from learning in general by novelty.

see where VSO could best address outstanding gaps, was used to set exit plans. Some volunteers left early, others extended slightly to try to consolidate gains, some short term volunteers were brought in to work until closure²⁵¹. In short a mixture of responses involving volunteers was planned for and links to other partners in the sector made as a way of moderating impact of withdrawal.²⁵² Links to potential donors and other volunteer sending agencies were made. The RAISA programme exit strategy²⁵³ demonstrates that considerable effort has been made to shore up partners and systems in the closing months of the VSO programme; one can only hope that given the continued high prevalence in Namibia other development partners will support many of the small community led organisations that are playing an essential role in delivering the national response. Despite all this there is some sense of disappointment; UNICEF expressed surprise in learning through my visit that VSO was still in country; they had noted “a rather abrupt end to the programme” and were under the impression that VSO departed Namibia in March 2012.

It is sometime easier to close a factory than to solve the management issues

Volunteer

Sustainability

This section is about programme VSO’s ability to generate and grow funds. Budget figures provided by London show that proportion of VSO Namibia budget supported by unrestricted funds as 49% of budget in 2010/11²⁵⁴ with the balance of funding from 7 other donors; 45% of budget in 2011/12 with the balance from 6 other donors.²⁵⁵ As with other countries visited there is some divergence in figures provided by London and from the Programme office, the latter for Namibia show 51% of a reduced overall budget covered by unrestricted funds.²⁵⁶ At the time of the Country Profile exercise there was just 1 pipeline proposal (for less than £150,000) and with the decision to close it is understandable that there has been no further focus on diversifying income.

Unrestricted funds are allocated (2011/12) as follows: 38% to staff costs; 30% to volunteer costs; 8% to office, premises and utilities costs and 22% to programme costs. Most partners contribute significantly to volunteer costs²⁵⁷ although clearly it has been necessary to complement these from unrestricted funds²⁵⁸.

Efficiency and value for money assessment

Step 3: development of individual partnership plans

I found no evidence of any partner assessment prior to May 2010: TKMOAS mention this occurred

²⁵¹ Education Programme Exit Strategy August 2011 and several HIV partner reviews held 2011/2012

²⁵² For example Friendly Haven was at this point linked to Legal Aid Centre and NANASO

²⁵³ October 2011

²⁵⁴ 2010/11 £581,196/£1,182,271; 2011/12 £503,873/1,126,169 ; PO Data £501,661/£985,730

²⁵⁵ Funds from an Irish Aid grant were allocated to Namibia in 2010/11 but not in the following year

²⁵⁶ But this is a lower total so represents less drawn down from DFID SGA (£501,661); figures provided by Programme Office

²⁵⁷ Planning Pilot Options for Discussion paper

²⁵⁸ One individual donor has funded the VSO programme in Namibia to manage a tender process, engage builders and build classrooms for orphans to receive pre-school and early years schooling. This donation appears to have led VSO into an unusual direction, although covering all costs of a programme officer and volunteer. This individual will continue to support some HIV/AIDS partners after closure of the VSO Programme. It was unclear whether this project has had any impact on the setting of the date for closure (March 2013) after the decision to close was taken (March 2011).

then for the first time part way into a second period of support; Positive Vibes records show this happening at the start of collaboration; Friendly Haven²⁵⁹ notes that this happened only much later (Jan 2011) as part of VSO constructing their own exit strategy; AMICAALL²⁶⁰ recalled that partner assessment was a paper based exercise in which they responded to a list of questions and there was no field assessment of the community programme. This lack of process is subsequently followed by some ineffective placements: the methodology and rationale for supporting AMICAALL was not clear as evidenced by a series of 3 placements where each volunteer returned early the last and longest ending after 10mths (06/2010); the volunteer at HAMU “actually did gap filling” and has helped produced some internal documents but there is likely to be little impact sustained when he leaves his placement in December.²⁶¹

VSO has in several instances been filling gaps repeatedly: at Friendly Haven a series of Social Workers (at least five) have been placed and replaced and once VSO decided to stop (01/2011) Government has seconded a Social Worker to the organisation. Another volunteer finance manager placed in Ministry of Health Directorate of Special Programmes in 2004 extended and extended his volunteer service until finally (06/2010) VSO felt it should end and he then made a seamless transition onto the Government payroll. At least this is a more positive example since he filled a skill gap that was a precondition of Global Funds Round 1 so there has been wider impact.

I found no partnership plans even where collaboration has extended over several years and covered different aspects (for example NANASO supported since 2002, with partnership covering OD, membership skills development, national volunteering and advocacy/campaigns). The push to establish exit strategies after the decision to close the programme is further evidence. Partners mentioned that the “needs are identified by us, and the timeframes determined by VSO” (TKMOAS; Kunene Regional Health Directorate; NANASO). The supply of short term volunteers to work on HR policies (NANASO, Friendly Haven) appears to meet VSO intent to collaborate with Randstad over a real felt need to address such issues, the failure to complete their task in 6mths is frustrating,²⁶² the delivery of 5 such volunteers to a single partner appears excessive and ineffective. Volunteers in an earlier discussion had also commented “Short term placements are not always such a good match; Randstad is an employment agency and sends different type of people.”

Step 4: VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans

Windhoek based volunteers all felt that assessment is broadly good (with some exceptions mentioned above). The matching of opportunity to skill set is a bit haphazard and they suggested using modern technology for a proper interview with Country Director and host organisation²⁶³

Preparing for Change is really really good – although a bit like ante natal classes you still don't quite know what to expect
Third time Volunteer

It is short term but intensive; tests your motivation; sets minimum standards and triggers own research. Interestingly standard of training received by AVI volunteers is felt to be more professional / better quality.²⁶⁴ I heard of several instances where volunteers had returned commonly for health

²⁵⁹ Partner since 1996

²⁶⁰ Namibia Chapter a partner since 2009

²⁶¹ Since 13 Regional posts to be filled have not yet been advertised; and there is a long communication chain between these regional RACE coordinators and schools (HAMU, Region, Circuits, Clusters, Schools)

²⁶² This same frustration with STV was expressed in Ghana

²⁶³ This is already a proposed improvement (Volunteer Journey work done in London)

²⁶⁴ Comment made in both Ghana and Namibia

or reasons of harsh climate; two were dismissed by the employer having poor skills and poor attitude²⁶⁵ but did not receive data requested on fill rates/ early return rates.

Step 5: Volunteers work with partners in country

Without exception the volunteers I met were engaging, committed and resilient. They filled capacity gaps willingly, took on additional roles²⁶⁶ and were flexible.²⁶⁷ The Education Exit strategy and some volunteers visited mention concerns about building capacity especially they had no direct counterpart; or the organisation was significantly understaffed; or the role they fulfil is not an established post and so there is no scope for sustaining the function with a local staff post after their departure; or the understanding and interest of their colleagues in the specialist area they have been brought in to develop is limited²⁶⁸. Although I saw some volunteer reports I did not find evidence of a clear paper trail of partner capacity assessment, partnership objectives, periodic collaborative assessment between VSO and partners of any improvement in organisational effectiveness and review of whether this translates to improved outcomes for target beneficiaries.

Step 6: Partner organisations are strengthened sustainably

There were several positive experiences where clearly able volunteers had increased the confidence and abilities of their co-workers (Positive Vibes; NIED; TKMOAMS; MoH Directorate of Special Programmes; Galz & Goals NFA). Whether this is likely to leave an increase in institutional capacity that is sustained depends of course on the initial critical capacity weakness. Taking for example TKMOAMS a small CBO that has been partnered by VSO since 2002; initial volunteer inputs created a profile and presence for the organisation, some physical structure from which community activities are organised. Later inputs have helped mobilise resources to keep the organisation functioning – albeit at a rather reduced level. To what extent the impact from VSO volunteers is sustained depends on the leadership and staff of this CBO being able to ensure its survival, finding other supporters *and* continuing to do something useful with the families they seek to serve. The organisation addresses a clear need (supporting families living with HIV) and has a vision of how to do this, strengthening the knowledge and skills of community based carers and representing their voice to duty bearers (ART providers and Government). Their continued existence seems fairly certain for now if rather precarious given some other donor support and local links with relevant authorities and health providers. It seems reasonable to assume some VSO contribution to this. However the decline in level of coverage and activities indicates that peak achievements have not been sustainable.

Step 7: As a result strengthened partner organisations are better able to deliver quality basic services and are better able to hold Governments to account / respond to community needs

I did not find evidence that this programme reviews quality and coverage of the basic services delivered by partners. Despite long term engagement in education I saw no reporting generated by VSO about improved results, quality of teaching, retention in schools. The visit to NIED illustrated several systemic problems with assessing educational impact (the absence of staff review mechanisms, the Automatic Promotion policy in schools allowing students that have failed an academic year to nevertheless progress, and the lack of M&E capacity within this Ministry). There has clear been a striking capacity gap that VSO has chosen not to try to address.

RAISA programme has one objective to strengthen partners' capacity to mitigate the socio economic impacts of HIV and AIDS on households and communities, through livelihoods and supportive

²⁶⁵ Namibian Football Association, TKMOAMS

²⁶⁶ Such a Jo at NIED taking on curriculum reform to share the workload of the department

²⁶⁷ Dickson at MOHSS Kunene had two requests to come for a shorter, and still shorter, placement to dovetail with VSO exit plans

²⁶⁸ Kunene Regional Health Directorate

policies and legislation that empowers individuals to claim their rights. This means both that VSO supports HIV organisations to work directly on advocacy (such as supporting NANASO to identify potential advocacy issues that is a starting point for developing some form of advocacy strategy); it consults and involves rights holders (such as community based care volunteers) representing and publicising their views and challenges – that is a contribution to informed debate. VSO also works in the region, particularly with SADC MPs to push for policy change. In this regard, as far as I have understood, VSO itself is lobbying, sometimes with partners but often on behalf of partners in SADC level forums and internationally (UNAIDS meetings). RAISA reporting states that women’s rights and HIV&AIDS remained a priority with a lot of advocacy work. Training of parliamentarians and other policy makers was scaled up in an effort to realise and protect the rights of care providers for People Living with HIV&AIDS. Three draft policies have been developed in Malawi, Mozambique and in Zimbabwe as a result of the work that VSO RAISA has been conducting with policy makers in southern Africa region. In Namibia Government has a policy on caregivers that is not well implemented, RAISA efforts have therefore been directed at having this adequately resourced and fully implemented and these negotiations are quite well advanced.²⁶⁹

Advocacy is a long term process but thus far the only evidence of impact on application of policy that has potential to better the situation of people living with HIV in Namibia I found, was from one local partner who did attribute their own awareness of the content of a Ministry circular to VSO and this to their actively pressuring for the contents of home based carers kits to be replenished more frequently. An excellent research report *Caring for the Care Providers*²⁷⁰ has been published and it is to be hoped that partners will be able to make use of this to continue lobbying for greater understanding of and responses to the considerable challenges facing all those unpaid and often unrecognised community members who are effectively bearing the burden of care.

Impact and value for money of SGA funding

SGA funding has mostly been used to fill gaps in the budget covering costs of staff providing general support for the whole programme and covering costs of volunteers. ‘Unrestricted’ funds provided through the DFID SGA covered 38% of the Programme Office budget in 2011/12 and were used to cover 59% of total staff costs; 80% of total office costs; 86% of total premises and utility costs; 57% of total Volunteer costs; and 32% of total Programme costs²⁷¹. This perfectly illustrates the history of DFID funding to VSO covering much of the core costs of the organisation’s programmes with other funding replacing this or adding scale in the form of additional volunteers and programme activities where this can be secured.

Concluding remarks

This country visit served well to illustrate the way things were done in VSO and to underscore the links in the Value Chain which must be changed in other country programmes if partner capacity is to be correctly assessed, the right inputs and effort provided and tangible improvements recorded and sustained. In particular the need to learn from partnerships not just about the organisation but about the services it delivers and whether these provide any positive outcomes for service users or beneficiaries is evident including the need for post hoc evaluations to find whether impact is sustainable. It is encouraging to learn that a regional M&E manager has recently been appointed to address these weaknesses. I believe some of the work through the RAISA funded partnerships has produced real changes for people living with HIV, albeit at modest scale and with much remaining to be done through effective advocacy. Given the destructive effect of the epidemic in Namibia that is

²⁶⁹ And have rather unfortunately been interrupted by a Parliamentary investigation into the Minister for Health a key ally

²⁷⁰ Tricia Bautista supported by Katherine Richards – March 2012

²⁷¹ Data provided by Finance team

undermining other improved development indicators, it is a pity that VSO has also decided to withdraw from this part of the programme.

Annex G5: Country programme report 5: Papua New Guinea

Assessed and written by Willem van Eekelen

Assignment

This assessment is part of a mid-term evaluation of VSO's Strategic Grant Agreement. The assessment took a week:

Tuesday, Sept 18	VSO's Madang office conversations about VSO's PNG strategy and its sector work, and office issues such as procurement and HR.
Wednesday, Sept 19	Visits to education authorities and three schools (only one of which was open), and a group discussion with volunteers.
Thursday, Sept 20	Visit to the University of Goroka, and conversations with Goroka-based volunteers.
Friday, Sept 21	Focus group discussions with education partners in Kundiawa, and conversations with Kundiawa-based volunteers.
Saturday, Sept 22	Travelling back from Kundiawa to Madang.
Sunday, Sept 23	-
Monday, Sept 24	Verification meetings in the VSO Madang office, debriefing and one school visit.

Marshall, Alex and Chris, respectively VSO's Education Programme Manager, a VSO international volunteer and a VSO driver, spent many hours on the road with me. This led to lengthy and most helpful conversations. I would like to thank them, and Richard for putting together the programme, and all others who have helped me understand the VSO work in PNG.

This report follows the standard IPR structure, which is the same for all 40 organisational reports that are being prepared in the context of DFID's 'Programme Partnership Arrangement' (PPA).

Some things are easy to verify. For example: it is easy to determine if a country office adheres to VSO's procurement policy. Other things seem worth sharing but are based on impressions rather than evidence. For example: I got the impression that, overall and in the long term, the sum total of volunteer efforts results in most impact if these efforts focus on radical innovation. Whenever my observations are tentative, I have stated that they are, and I have not translated the observations into recommendations. In all cases, I am happy to consider additional evidence, or other interpretations of existing evidence, and look forward to the comments and corrections that I hope the PNG office will provide me with.

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

Coffey on the performance assessment against logframe

The extent to which grantees have delivered on outputs and achieved the changes indicated in their logframes. In the first annual review this will largely assess outputs, while subsequent reviews will be able to increasingly assess outcomes. The assessment will be of the whole organization or of the part of an organization's programme covered by the PPA.

About consistency

Many of VSO PNG projects have a logframe, and these logframes are in various stages of development (e.g. the logframe for the health sector has been developed conceptually, but is not yet populated). There is also a country-wide logframe,²⁷² and VSO PNG feeds into the global SGA logframe, for which the country office had its last major logframe-related activity in June 2012.²⁷³ I have not yet seen this exercise's calculations, choices and assumptions.

Most of the overall logframe – which is the one that I am assessing against - is related to the organisation's ultimate rather than immediate beneficiaries, and the resulting numbers are subject to 'heroic assumptions.' For example: VSO trains teachers and uses, as the basis for the calculation of VSO's reach, these teachers' pupils in the current year. VSO could equally sensibly have assumed that the reach was the number of pupils these teachers will teach in the coming three years, or in the coming five years, or a proportion of these teachers' current pupils.

VSO PNG has to make choices when calculating its contributions to VSO's global logframe and in as far as I am able to judge these choices appear reasonable. To ensure that they are comparable over time, it is important that the choices and assumptions that underpin the calculations are documented in an accessible location (I understood that VSO PNG's e-filing system works well, but I have not seen it in action) and used consistently over time.

Recommendation 1

The VSO PNG office would benefit from a detailed logframe protocol that provides all measurements, choices and assumptions. Such protocol would help ensure that the calculations are consistent longitudinally.

About impact and reach

²⁷² Note that I have not yet seen this logframe, unless it is the table on pages 7-11 of the Annual Country Review Report PNG 2011-12, which is a useful overview of interventions, results and impact – but does not quite tick all the logframe boxes (e.g. baselines, milestones).

²⁷³ At the end of this exercise there was at least some sense that 'this was actually quite helpful.' But the exercise also caused some stress and organisational fear, and I wonder if there are no better ways for the UK office to get its information – it seems that there are quite a few information requests that could perhaps be combined, and the benefits and gathering methods of which could be explained with a bit more care. I understood that the M&E function in London is working on a single M&E framework that may eventually lead to a single exercise that feeds into the reports of multiple donors.

VSO PNG reports to reach, through its partners' service provision, well over a third of PNG's population.²⁷⁴ These numbers are about reach rather than impact. This impact will insignificant for one person and profound and life-changing for another – but they both count as 'one beneficiary.'²⁷⁵

Admirably, VSO PNG's programme designs do not give in to the intuitive pressure to maximise reach, if this is likely to be at the cost of impact. Its health programmes are a good example of this: in the coming period, the country programme will invest in grassroots-level PLWHA organisations that have a track record of service delivery²⁷⁶ and have come together to facilitate mutual and external support. Working with these organisations will not always work out as they are small and fragile, and their reach is inevitably limited. But the choice may nonetheless be a wise one as, in the long run, these organisations may grow into very meaningful stakeholders in the country's HIV-related efforts.

Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Effects on poor and marginalised groups

Coffey on 'improving lives'

An assessment of the extent and the manner of changes in the lives of poor and marginalized people as a result of the changes achieved, and the extent to which these changes are likely to be sustained. It is recognised that agency reporting in this area is likely to be illustrative of changes, rather than comprehensive across the portfolio.

In the section titled 'Value for Money assessment' I discuss the relative lack of assessments in relation to the effectiveness of VSO PNG's work. In absence of such assessments it is impossible for me to assess the effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society, and the remainder of this section is therefore very tentative.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the impact ranges profound to negligible. To illustrate the spectrum, I give one example of a best, an expected, and a worst case scenario. My analysis is very tentative, and merely based on anecdotal evidence.

Best case scenario: massive impact

VSO's Peter Credoc introduced rice cultivation to the highlands and the impact has been profound, wide-reaching, long-lasting and directly attributable to VSO and its partners. The initial success is rooted in the volunteer's expertise ('this crop would grow well in this region') and partnership ('here is a school garden in which to show the potential'). The subsequent and widespread replication that

²⁷⁴ 2.3 million people, out of a population of 6.3 million people. With such numbers, impact is impossible to assess.

²⁷⁵ I have not yet seen the calculations but was told that VSO PNG assumes that reach is consistently 100%. For example: the assumption is that every teacher who receives in-service training subsequently changes something that will make a difference to every one of her or his pupils. I may have misunderstood this and look forward to receiving the choices and assumptions that the logframe calculations have been based on.

²⁷⁶ "Members facilitate HIV testing, treatment and care for others, visit 'friends' in hospital, provide crucial peer counselling and support, and organise and deliver HBC, often walking long distances to reach people in rural areas. The women's group Tru Prens provides food, accommodation and washing facilities for women from remote communities who come to Hagen for testing and/or treatment. [...] This is the core of what all the provincial groups do." (Quoted from Cousins, J, page 18-19.)

was based on buy-in from the authorities (which provide rice mills, for example) and a strong and direct incentive on the side of the individual (i.e. 'if I do this my income will increase').

Recommendation 2

VSO's successful introduction of rice cultivation in the highlands of PNG is one of several examples of VSO having a deep and long-lasting impact. Such examples could be used to learn from and for marketing purposes.²⁷⁷ This requires thorough impact (and, in the case of rice cultivation, cost-benefit) analyses.

Common scenario: short term and some longer term impact

VSO's Deb and David set out to improve the educational system and mentality of the University of Goroka, but found little appetite for change.²⁷⁸ Accepting this, they focused their attention on introducing students' classroom observation, producing better textbook material, and direct teaching.

I have not been able to assess this at any level of depth, but it strikes me that the nature of the required buy-in, incentives and barriers may be useful as a success predictor. In this case (and I saw other cases that follow a very similar pattern):

- System change and changes in the university priorities may have long term benefits (mild incentive) but require the senior leadership team's active buy-in and lots of work (strong disincentive), and it is risky (second strong disincentive). This part of Deb and David's work was not successful.
- School observation, as part of the teacher training curriculum, has an immediate benefit: it is good for the students (mild incentive). The first time might be difficult to arrange (no disincentive as the volunteers are arranging it all) but after this it gets much easier: the school is immediately next to the university, and observation does not cost any money (barely a disincentive). This part of Deb and David's work was successful – the Department Head, volunteers and students were all confident that the system will continue.
- Developing a high-quality text book to strengthen the quality of a module serves the immediate interests of the students (first mild incentive). The development cost a lot of effort (no disincentive as the volunteers are arranging it all)²⁷⁹ but once it exists it is easier to continue using it than it would be to return to the previous books (second mild incentive to continue after the volunteers' departure).
- Taking over teaching duties is easy to arrange as there is a clear incentive (i.e. 'if they do it I don't have to do it'). The impact of the teaching (and, with this, role-modelling) may be significant²⁸⁰ but it is time-bound which is why, in many countries, VSO has gradually moved out of direct teaching.

²⁷⁷ Hopefully the marketing message would not be 'this is what we do,' as this would not be truthful, but 'this is what we could achieve.'

²⁷⁸ 'Did we impact on the university structure and mentality? No. Did we change the mindset of teachers? No, or little.'

²⁷⁹ Not entirely without support from the teaching staff: they reviewed chapters.

²⁸⁰ Strikingly, when reflecting on the impact of their modules, students did not focus on the module contents but on the delivery methods of Deb and David: 'they call us by our names, instead of just pointing and saying you.'

Tentative suggestion 1

It might be helpful to map a partner's incentives and disincentives to different types of change, when drawing up plans. Even if VSO does this, there will be an element of unpredictability, and it is wise to allow volunteers considerable flexibility to deviate from these terms of reference.²⁸¹

Several worst case scenarios: not much short term or long term impact

There are placements that cannot be filled, volunteers who do not complete their assignment, volunteers who choose not to build on the work of their predecessors and instead start the same thing from scratch ('the first thing I did was tear up the work of my predecessor, as it was useless. '), and volunteers who do not have a counterpart and therefore fear that they will not be able to leave a legacy ('It is an exciting life, but I'm not getting anywhere').

What I found most striking is the amount of work that fails even though the opportunity seemed so obvious, the design was so careful and the implementation was so thorough.

Everybody loved Ben Williams. In Madang he is by far the most frequently mentioned volunteer. He is widely admired for his modesty ('he always came on his bicycle') and his work ('he was just so helpful and he knew very much about many things').

Ben tried hard to build on the work of his predecessors, but schools asked him to respond to entirely new requests instead. Ben delivered much-appreciated in-service training and inspired schools to form the 'Madang Group.' Together, they undertook a number of initiatives. Some of these initiatives died quickly (e.g. the desire to gain basic computer skills disappeared after two lessons) but other initiatives were seen through until the end, and the resulting tools – manuals, check lists – are still on the schools' shelves.

But the Madang Group has not met since Ben left the province; most teachers never did the exercises he asked them to do at the end of his many in-service training sessions; and several of the resources that he and other volunteers had helped develop are not being used. 'You know, Willem, he did such a good job... but you know what we are like... we do not follow up.'²⁸²

I do not feel confident about the things that separate success and failure, but it seems that incentives need to be fairly strong for things to continue, and that the smallest challenge may cause things to stop.

VSO's Alex and a standard officer took inspiration from a piece of research that compared exam scores across schools in Madang province – and added to it by assessing the scores of specific types of questions, to help schools prepare better for the following year's grade 8 exams. The research was ready in June, and needed to be sent to the schools, for them to consider implications for teaching focus. When I saw the Standard Officer responsible, on September 19th, the research report had not yet been sent – and the exams are coming in November.

²⁸¹ Provided that such deviations are discussed and documented, and not merely caused by every new volunteer having a new set of interests. Some interviewees had the impression that 'there is not a strong VSO identity – it is just a set of individuals doing their thing.' Others did not feel the same way, and my limited observations suggest a mixture of the two. One volunteer noted, sensibly, that 'what hangs it together is the project management. We, the volunteers, we are not development professionals – we're technical specialists.'

²⁸² These examples are merely meant to illustrate that even very high-calibre volunteers are not consistently successful; other parts of Ben's work have had much more impact.

Relevance

Representativeness

Coffey on representativeness

The degree to which the supported civil society organisations [this refers to VSO] represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies (including where relevant the poorest and most marginalized). This will include an assessment of whether the planned interventions, as described in the logframe, continue to respond to these needs and priorities.

VSO's key assets are its international volunteers who:

- are, upon arrival, not yet intimately familiar with the country and the communities they aim to serve;
- need time to settle and do not normally stay for many years;
- work through partners rather than directly with the people and communities they aim to serve;
- live daily lives that are far removed from these people and communities.

These are considerable drawbacks. VSO strives to compensate for these drawbacks in four ways:

- A careful selection of volunteers. Tom compared his selection 30 years ago and now, and found that today's recruitment process is much more focused on qualities such as resilience, humour, improvisation skills and cultural sensitivity.
- A thorough pre-departure training and post-arrival induction process.²⁸³ The volunteers find this useful and found it easy to give examples of ways in which the process had helped them (from dress code and language to practical arrangements and the benefits of talcum powder).
- Needs assessments. In many cases, these assessments are based on the partners' preferences and priorities, which is likely to be more effective than an imposed agenda.²⁸⁴ More profoundly, VSO sometimes uses research to direct its work. Tom told me that much of the work with Calan is based on research done, at village level, on the prevalence of, services available for, and perceptions related to various types of disability.²⁸⁵
- Attracting seasoned experts. The volunteers in Goroka, for example, are all learning-inclined ex-heads of schools with previous cross-cultural exposure and knowledge that cuts across a range of teaching dimensions (e.g. direct teaching, school management, curriculum development, special needs). Often, such seasoned and culturally sensitive professionals will be able to implement international good practice principles even in absence of a lengthy exposure to a particular culture. To give just one very obvious example: interactive teaching techniques generally work better than one-directional teaching – also, fairly quickly, in cultures that are not accustomed to classroom participation, and even, at least partially, in institutions that are resistant to change.

²⁸³ In other countries we have heard a few complaints of people who felt that today's induction process is less thorough than it used to be – but in PNG everybody seemed to feel the process, including the online parts of it, was adequate, with the exception of one volunteer who noted that 'lots of pre-departure training disappeared; with this pre-departure training VSO managed to turn technical specialists into development professionals'.

²⁸⁴ This probably works best for partners that truly represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies. This is not always the case.

²⁸⁵ Thornton, P and Pirpir, L (2008) *Discovering Disability in Papua New Guinea; prevalence, perceived causes, service use and unmet needs*, Calan Services, Indara, India.

Even if all volunteers are of consistent high calibre in all the competencies required, and as is the case in all INGOs, VSO will not always represent and respond to the needs and priorities of their constituencies. Much depends on the partner environment, which is covered in the section titled 'Partnerships.'

Targeting strategy

Coffey on targeting

The extent to which the interventions target the poorest and most marginalized, and the extent to which they target in such a way as to achieve maximum benefit. These targeting strategies are likely to be mutually exclusive, and the assessment will reflect on the way in which the balance between them has been struck. This will include an assessment of whether the targeting continues to be relevant.

VSO PNG's internal strategy 2012-2015 says that "Desk research, research with key stakeholders, partners, donors, volunteers and VSO programme office staff have all indicated that our programmatic focus should be on health and education, with a concentration on service delivery and systems strengthening" (page 6). I note that:

- Other countries' Programme Planning Scenarios list sectors and score their fit with a range of dimensions on a five-point scale.²⁸⁶ In PNG, I have not seen evidence of this or any type of comparative sector assessment.
- The strategy is very wide. It covers elementary, primary, secondary, college and informal education; partners at national, provincial and district level; and partnerships with government authorities, churches, NREs and community-based organisations. It may well be a sensible to have such a wide-ranging strategy, because VSO's key strength is innovative and quality-focused niche work, and such work may be done at various levels and with a wide range of partners.²⁸⁷ However, such a wide strategy makes it important to avoid becoming donor-driven²⁸⁸ and to carefully map potential partners (as in: what are the stakeholders in this sector and, for each of them, what would be the SWOT of a possible partnership). I am unable to assess the basis on which potential partners have and have not been selected as I have not seen evidence of cross-organisational comparisons that inform the choice for the partnerships in the first place.²⁸⁹ (I have seen a single piece of evidence in relation of a later step, which is the selection of partners within a broad partnership group. Specifically: the PACCB project assessed 13 PAC secretariats on the basis of pre-defined criteria, and invited the seven PACS with the closest fit for partnership.)

²⁸⁶ I.e. fit to core programme focus; improving poor people's access to quality services; promoting policies to support poor people; participation of socially-excluded groups; opportunities for linkages with other programmes or funding; and 'constraints'.

²⁸⁷ An additional reason could be that a wide strategy allows VSO to tap into a wide range of funding possibilities (without, of course, losing track of VSO's core aims and assets).

²⁸⁸ Some volunteers already have this worry. 'Nowadays we are project-based and this means that you get donor-driven. Women, the environment? Yeah, OK.'

²⁸⁹ The summary of the research that underpins the current VSO PNG strategy provides overviews of large companies and INGOs, but not a systematic overview of the advantages and drawbacks of all potential partnerships in the fields of health and education. (*PNG Situation Analysis*; note that I have not seen the larger document that this summary is based on.)

- I do not yet understand how all activities fit within this strategy. The logic and the links with the wider sector programmes seems stronger in some placements (such as the ones at the University of Goroka and the Tokaut Theatre Troupes) than in other placements (such as the urban town planner and the support provided to the Palm Oil Project). Some of the explanation is that existing agreements were – wisely - honoured even if these agreements were not in line with the new strategy. For example, VSO honoured its promise to Madang to provide a town planner, but he is unlikely to be replaced (partly because the position does not befit the strategy and partly because it has not been a very fruitful partnership).
- The strategy notes that “As our emphasis is on most disadvantaged populations we will necessarily be working in communities in rural areas” (page 7). The new SMS-based education programme is an example of how this principle can be applied. In other parts of the education work a focus on rural schools is hard to maintain, as rural communities are typically hard to reach and it is tempting to engage with the schools closer to the office.²⁹⁰ Security constraints further limit female volunteers’ ability to visit rural schools, which means that the urban bias is stronger in the Madang than in the Simbu Province.²⁹¹

Recommendations 3 and 4

- There may be a case for developing things such as explicit partnership criteria against which potential partnerships are assessed, and exit strategies for all partnerships (as per VSO’s Value Chain and Path to Partnership.)
- To monitor and minimise any urban bias in education in particular, it might be useful to employ simple tools such as a whiteboard table that lists the schools and on which VSO keeps track of visits.

Effectiveness

Learning

Coffey on learning

The extent to which grantees learn from their work, and integrate the learning into improved programming, as well as the extent to which others (civil society, governmental and international organisations) make use of this learning in altered policy and practice.

VSO is a learning organisation, and this manifests itself in each of Coffey’s three types of learning: to improve VSO’s own capacity, to provide contextual knowledge, and to share with other stakeholders. I will cover them in turn.

Learning that improves VSO’s own capacity

Coffey on learning that improves the organization’s own capacity: This learning is essentially organizational development for the grantee. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved programming, in the intervention from which it arose and beyond.

²⁹⁰ The ability or preparedness to visit the more distant schools varies per volunteer. Here, too, Ben Williams’ work was compared favourably to the work of other volunteers: ‘The other volunteers are less active... they don’t go out that far.’

²⁹¹ I have not yet seen evidence to this effect and base it on a written statement from Richard.

I have seen a few examples of project designs being partly inspired by external evaluations,²⁹² and I have seen evidence of learning-in-practice (such as the problem tree, on Sanjay's office wall). Conversely, I have not seen evidence of a learning *system* that ensures that evidence-based learning happens to the fullest extent possible.

Recommendation 5, 6 and 7

VSO PNG could strengthen its learning systems by systematically:

- feeding into and utilising good practice guidance from the wider VSO family;
- conducting post-closure evaluations to assess lasting impact; and
- utilising the considerable amount of insights that the volunteers provide in the exit documentation and intranet to identify overall lessons.²⁹³

Learning that provides contextual knowledge

Coffey on learning that provides contextual knowledge, essential for good programming: for example learning about the situation of a target population. This learning is largely specific to a particular context and will have little generalizability. Grantees will need to show that this learning has demonstrably improved programming, in the intervention from it arose.

Each individual volunteer builds networks and contextual knowledge in the course of the placement, and different volunteers estimate the time it takes to be fully functional from three months to a year.²⁹⁴ Such learning sometimes changes the focus of the volunteers' work. Deb and David, for example, joined the University of Goroka in order to strengthen its teaching college's underpinning systems. They learned over time that system changes are unlikely to happen, and therefore turned their attention on direct teaching, the development of better teaching material, and the introduction of teacher observation.

Learning that can be shared with others

Coffey on learning that can be shared with others: for example, improved ways of ensuring participation of marginalized groups. This is learning that can be generalized from the intervention context. Grantees will need to describe their strategy for communicating the learning and the extent to which others took up the learning. Grantees should also use this section to report on their interaction with the Learning Partnership and its four thematic sub-groups and how this interaction affects their capacity to learn and share learning. This type of learning overlaps with innovation.

²⁹² To give but one example: at least partly inspired by an external evaluation, Sanjay is looking at possibilities to utilise the Tokaut project for other purposes than the issue of HIV/Aids.

²⁹³ The volunteer exit process is elaborate and creates lots of data. The intranet is a source of tools and insights too, and partly populated by volunteers: 'This is my Phonix tool – feel free to use it.'

²⁹⁴ These are volunteer estimates. One senior counterpart was rather more critical: 'There are people who need a lot of time to adapt, and by the time they are adapted they leave again. This happens 50-50.'

VSO does not just share with others: the organisation *is about* sharing with others. Not all sharing leads to replication, and it will be frustrating for volunteers who face indifference or resistance within their partner organisation. But in many cases sharing does lead to replication. This happens at different levels within the country (though not yet internationally) and I will give but one example of each level:

- Replication that benefits oneself. People started cultivating rice, barley and apples after a volunteer introduced these crops to the highlands.²⁹⁵
- Replication that benefits others. Pupils benefit from teachers who copy teaching methods that they picked up from volunteers.
- Replication by partners. Both the Head of Department and the students of the University of Goroka feel certain that the department will continue the newly introduced practice of teacher observation in an early stage of the curriculum.
- Replication across the country. A volunteer supported the Simbu educational authorities with the development of a year 9 school book which has been adopted country-wide.
- Replication by other organisations. Parts of the Tokaut theatre group concept has been replicated by Save the Children.

Innovation

Coffey on innovation

The extent to which grantees develop, test, and achieve the adoption by others of new knowledge, such as in techniques, approaches, and design of interventions. Innovation is a special type of learning. It is distinguished from learning in general by novelty.

VSO's primary assets are its volunteers' expertise and ability to import international good practice. This renders VSO ideally suited for innovative work.

This requires risk-taking and the recognition that innovation is a matter of trial and error. For example, I do not know if VSO's new SMS-based primary education project will succeed or not – but the initiative is a calculated risk, based on a successful small scale experiment (with a control group) and it might turn out to be very useful indeed. Whatever the outcome, the decision to develop this programme is a sound one.

Ultimately and if the work is driven by calculated risks, the sum of the benefits of successful innovations is likely to exceed the sum costs of innovation successes and failures together (as in: a success such as the introduction of rice cultivation can carry a large number of failures).

²⁹⁵ Such replication may snowball: rice cultivation started in one part of the PNG highlands, and has now spread to another part.

Tentative suggestions 2 and 3

When selecting volunteer placements, it may be worth:

- prioritising radical innovation (e.g. introducing new crops, establishing the country's first teacher training department for early childhood development) over incremental change (e.g. in-service training to teachers, lecturing);
- prioritising work that requires specialist expertise (e.g. inclusive education, curriculum development) over work that can be sourced locally (e.g. excel training, teaching). It might be worth to introduce a budgetary allocation for activities that can be sourced locally.

Partnership working

Coffey on partnerships

The extent to which partnerships are made with others (civil society, the private sector, governmental and international organisations) that enhance the effectiveness and impact of interventions and encourage sustainability. Partnerships that build sustainability might include:

10. leveraging funds for continuation,
11. securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach,
12. building capacity of southern actors to deliver a service or to monitor service delivery.

In this section I only cover the first two of these three types of partnerships, as the third one is the core of what VSO is about, and covered throughout this report.

Leveraging funds for continuation

DFID is reducing its support to VSO, and the organisation is currently investing in its other funding streams. In doing so, VSO could learn from VSO PNG, which has – for VSO standards – an unusually strong portfolio of institutional programme funding. The portfolio is fairly diverse, with a dependency risk on AusAid. The country office is aware of this risk, and working to reduce it.²⁹⁶

Securing policy adoption of an intervention or approach

VSO is part of a few inter-agency initiatives with an advocacy agenda. In addition and more directly, I saw evidence of products (books, monitoring tools) that found their way from the province to the national level, and from the education authorities to schools. There is inter-NGO adoption too: Save the Children copied some the Tokaut model.

Sustainability

Coffey on sustainability

Coffey asks evaluators to test the “sustainability hypothesis”, which is that “direct service delivery is localised and unsustainable, whereas civil society holding government to account leads to broader and more sustainable results.” (Coffey Evaluation Strategy, Annex 4, page 2).

In many places, and in the very long run possibly in *all* places, this hypothesis has value – but the scope for rights-based programming in PNG is limited.

²⁹⁶ Its next major proposal, for example, is going to go to the Dutch Lottery Fund.

The strategy of VSO PNG states that its work is ‘always within the framework of rights-based approaches’ (page 6) and in doing so VSO PNG focuses on the capacity of the duty bearers, not on the voice of the right holders. Much of VSO PNG’s work is in line with this statement, and focuses on the traditional duty bearers – and specifically the different types of educational authorities. Where possible, VSO PNG seeks to build their capacity to fulfil their rights-based responsibilities. Sometimes this requires skills that are not available in PNG, and sometimes this requires skills that could be sourced locally (e.g. computer skills training).²⁹⁷

But focusing on capacity building is not always feasible. For VSO to work within a rights-based approach, its partners ideally work towards a rights-based agenda, identify their own capacity gaps and ask for VSO support (X asks Y to address Z). Ideally, the partners then provide an environment that is enabling (X allows Y to address Z),²⁹⁸ empowering (X enables Y to address Z), receptive (X listens to Y’s advice on Z) and responsive (X utilises and builds on Y’s work on Z). I have not seen any partners that befit this description from beginning to end, and have seen one or more positive and negative examples of each of the dimensions.

Seeking to strengthen capacity is not always a useful thing to do if the partners exhibit a very limited ability to change, and very limited interest in changing. Essentially: you need to want to change to stand a chance of changing, and this is not always the case.²⁹⁹

Wherever capacity-building work is unlikely to succeed, VSO PNG has three options:

- Continue to work ‘within the framework of rights-based approaches’ by focusing on the voice of the right holders. The upcoming work with community groups of and for PLWHA might end up as an example to this – but it is not VSO’s traditional field of expertise.
- Provide direct services (e.g. teaching, rather than developing teaching systems). I am not at all inclined to criticise this choice of activities. First, work would get very frustrating without the liberty to deviate from right-based interventions when such interventions do not work. Second, direct service delivery, *as part of a partnership*, may strengthen a bond and builds credibility (‘she’s a really good teacher!’), which might enable VSO to return to capacity building when the opportunity presents itself (provided that VSO keeps this in mind and does not merely accept the role of service provider).
- Work with partners who are not the traditional duty-bearers. In PNG, this makes sense as the government’s coverage of even the most basic of rights is very limited. Much is in the hands of the churches which, to give but one example, run all-but-one of the country’s teacher training colleges.

²⁹⁷ Computer skills training is never the focus for a placement but is often part of a broader training/capacity building programme. For volunteers this often represents a quick win in terms of relationship building.

²⁹⁸ I have not come across things that volunteers are expressly barred from addressing. Instead, it takes the shape of people being unavailable. ‘We met ten times, and then we needed X to join a meeting, to get the plans OKed – but X just never showed up.’

²⁹⁹ And sometimes it is *explicitly* not the case. The PNG Situational Analysis quotes a PNG Minister, who told a PNG-Australian Aid Review team: “We have far too many plans in PNG and too little effective implementation.” (PNG Situational Analysis, page 36.) Also in this context of change: a comment on an early draft of this report was that it is important to consider “the pace of change too – it may feel to one individual volunteer that not much has changed but the cumulative effect of maybe 2-3 volunteers (with different skill sets and different objectives) over a longer time offers a different picture [...] change can also happen implicitly e.g. calling students by their names rather than “you.”

In short: Coffey's sustainability hypothesis has value and should be kept in mind at all times – but in the case of VSO PNG it would be frustrating and ineffective to work only in line with this hypothesis.

Value for Money assessment

Coffey on Value for Money

Whether the project or programme has achieved the best combination of economy ('doing things at the right price'), efficiency ('doing things the right way') and effectiveness ('doing the right things').

Introductory note.

Organisations around the world are in competition with each other and therefore commonly create the impression that the impact of their programmes is consistent, immediate and enormous. Reality is that new and innovative programmes in particular are risky and may either fail or take years of trial and error before reaching maximum impact. Judging such innovative programmes on the basis of their initial efficiency and effectiveness criteria kills innovation.

Economy

Coffey on Economy

Relates to the amount of resources or inputs (usually measured in financial cost) which are required to achieve a given output. Fewer – 'cheaper' – resources or inputs represents greater economy (i.e. spending less).

Marshall's recent negotiation with a Goroka rest house; Minnie's work to avoid paying rent for empty accommodation; the sharing of vehicles whenever possible: these are all indications of cost-effective behaviour.³⁰⁰ Less direct but equally important: VSO PNG does not seem inclined to re-invent wheels.³⁰¹ This is good. It would be even better if VSO PNG:

- **Followed due procurement process, and documented it.** VSO PNG did not have VSO's international procurement policy, and did not adhere to good practice principles in relation to procurement. A very quick and superficial check showed that the procurement-related documentation is not filed in a single location; there is no procurement committee; there are no three quotes (or a note saying that it was impossible to obtain three quotes); and there is no documented explanation of procurement choices. This does not necessarily lead to bad procurement decisions, but it does mean that it is impossible to confirm that all procurement decisions are verifiably sound.
- **Periodically and formally reviewed decisions in relation to the country office's major cost drivers.** PNG is an unusually expensive country with an unusual shortage in key things such as accommodation and car rentals, and unusual and costly safety requirements. It may therefore be inevitable that VSO PNG rents accommodation that is costly and that it has more office space than the organisation requires. But it cannot merely be *assumed* that there is no other suitable office space available, and that it is impossible to change the lease agreement to allow for other

³⁰⁰ I have also heard examples that suggest that this cost-effectiveness is not consistently on everybody's mind, and when I visited the office in the evening it struck me how much electricity this empty office was still consuming.

³⁰¹ An example: 'there is a lot of research already out there, on climate change, and I don't see a need for replicating that.' (Nicky, 24.09.2012, in the context of the preparations for the multi-country and multi-agency Coral Triangle Initiative.)

organisations to rent part of VSO's office space: it has to be documented, and periodically reviewed.

Recommendations 8 and 9

VSO PNG would strengthen its procurement practice if it followed the VSO procurement policy, and if it documented its choices and attempts in relation to all its major cost drivers.

More broadly: VSO PNG has not followed up on all the recommendations of the internal audit of August 2010. Unless swift action is taken, the new internal audit of November 2012 is likely to highlight several of the same issues once again.

Effectiveness

Coffey on Effectiveness

The extent to which objectives are met. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how far have the project or programme's outputs and impacts contributed to it achieving its objectives? An example would be: did the teacher placement programme improve the quality of the school curriculum or raise achievement?

I have been unable to assess the effectiveness of the work of VSO PNG. There are two reasons for this:

- VSO works with partners, and that the effects of its work on poor and marginalised groups are therefore generally indirect, highly dependent on the calibre of the partner, and hard to attribute.
- VSO does not consistently monitor and evaluate its impact, and I have not seen any evidence of post-closure impact assessments (i.e. looking at the sustainability of the impact, several years after a programme or programme component has been closed).

For several reasons, VSO would benefit from a more rigorous approach to M&E:

- **Learning.** Some of the activities amount to multi-year investments that are made without robust assessments of the usefulness of the work. In-service teacher training is a good example of this: VSO PNG does not measure, systematically and without the large social desirability bias that often accompanies self-reporting, the impact of its training. Such assessments are complicated by system flaws such as the annual rotation of teachers, but they are not impossible.
- **Partnership assessments.** VSO PNG chooses not to accommodate VSO's request for exit strategies for all partners.³⁰² I do not have a problem with this in principle – there are good arguments for very long term partnerships – but if a country office chooses not to follow organisation-wide directives then it must be extra careful in documenting the reasons – and, in this case, the very considerable and ongoing benefits that these partnerships apparently have. It would be useful, for example, to get an idea of the usefulness of the 52 years of support to the

³⁰² The current strategy is the first one that mentions the possibility of partnership exit at all. *None* of the partners I have interviewed mentioned the possibility of exiting from the partnership, and when I prompted them they all expressed a desire to 'continue for as long as possible.' Sometimes this sense of continuity was so strong that the partner ascribed a permanent role for VSO: 'the government occasionally comes with big policies, and they don't explain what we have to do. This is why we need VSO.' (Note that this partner greatly appreciated VSO playing this role – as is robustly illustrated by the partner giving VSO a land rover.)

PNG education authorities. Unlike most NGOs, VSO is well-placed to conduct such assessments because of the (still) very large proportion of unrestricted income.³⁰³

- **Image and marketability.** I have been told that, in the past, VSO prided itself in giving all the credit of its achievements to its partners, and in downplaying its own contributions. This is admirable but outdated in an era with so much pressure to access funding. VSO needs to claim and market its achievements, and to do this the organisation needs to know what these achievements are and amount to. From the anecdotal information I gathered in the course of this one-week visit, I got the distinct impression that one of VSO's most convincing success stories is from the Simbu region of PNG (see the best case scenario). Surely, the marketing benefits of this story far outweigh the costs of a post-closure assessment.

Recommendation 10

There are strong reasons for investing in VSO PNG's M&E work – and particularly in post-closure evaluations, which currently do not exist.

Efficiency

Coffey on Efficiency

The relationship between output, in terms of goods, services or other results, and the resources used to produce them. The question that would need to be asked is: 'how economically have the various inputs been converted into outputs, outcomes and impacts? Could more effects have been obtained with the same budget? In other words 'doing the right things at the right price'.

I have been impressed by the calibre and drive of VSO PNG's pool of volunteers. It is possible to utilise these volunteers more fully by addressing two issues:

1. Volunteer-related risk mitigation. The Country Office Quarterly Report includes some statistics on the country's volunteer placements but does not include the statistic that worries me most, which is that *the early return rate exceeds 40 per cent.*³⁰⁴ This is in addition to placements that are never filled (an overview and analysis of which I have not yet seen) and aggravates a common complaint of partners: 'people leave before the work is finished and somebody else comes later, with a different skill set and a new agenda.'

This issue is not covered in the strategy or any of the other documentation that I have gone seen, does not seem to feature prominently on the agenda, and has not led to a thorough review of VSO PNG's partnership portfolio.

Recommendation 11

³⁰³ VSO may well argue that its need for in-depth post hoc impact studies are a reason for DFID to continue its unrestricted support – but the organisation needs to build a track record for this argument to be credible.

³⁰⁴ 98 volunteers arrived in the past four years. Of these, 28 volunteers have not yet completed their first assignment and will not do so in the very near future, so it is not yet possible to assess if they will complete their assignment. The remaining 70 volunteers have either arrived and departed, or arrived and extended, or arrived and nearly completed their assignment. Of these 70 volunteers, 30 – some 43% - have left before their first assignment was originally meant to be completed. Note that this figure is not consistent with VSO's worldwide spread sheet, which uses calculations that we have not seen and that arrives as a PNG early return rate of 28%.

VSO PNG has a volunteer early return rate of over 40 per cent. This warrants a thorough review of causes and implications.

2. The way volunteers are being utilised. This is largely due to the very limited capacity (and sometimes interest) of the partners, all of whom readily admit that they see their volunteers, in part, as an 'extra pair of hands.' Some volunteers added to this that this 'extra pair of hands' often needs to find its own work: 'Much of the current demand is created by the volunteers.'³⁰⁵

If VSO wants to continue working in PNG, it has to accept that this work is subject to the Steedman's 'governance paradox': "the weaker capacity is to start with, the harder it is to build."³⁰⁶ This means that volunteers sometimes provide support that:

- is not utilised immediately (VSO helps schools to prepare for a new curriculum that is subsequently postponed), to the full (Ben's guide to in-service training) or indeed at all (Alex's research on exam results);
- that does not require foreign expertise (training on Excel, teaching); and
- that will not outlive the volunteer's presence (Patrick's work as a urban planner).

Careful design, flexibility over time, exiting from some and entering other partnerships, active risk mitigation: it may all help, but very nearly all partnerships are risky, and VSO PNG is unlikely to ever reach the point where its support is 'efficient' in conventional terms.

³⁰⁵ Focus group discussion with volunteers, on 19.09.2012. Note that not all volunteers shared this impression.

³⁰⁶ Quotes in the PNG Situational Analysis, page 37.

Annex G6: Country programme report 6: Tanzania

Assessed and written by Sue Enfield

Country Programme Assessment

This assessment is a part of the Strategic Grant Agreement mid-term review of VSO's work. Tanzania was selected as one country amongst six, for in depth review since it was implicated early on in the Programme Planning Process (PPP) through which country strategy is reassessed and programme direction adjusted accordingly. We therefore assumed that given this early inclusion in the process, implementation of any revised strategy would be further advanced than in late adopters.

I spent a day and a half in Dar es Salaam meeting the VSO Tanzanian management team and holding in depth conversations with the Country Director, programme staff with responsibility for work in education, health and livelihoods, and with Programme Support and Finance managers. I was also able to meet the Deputy Head of the DFID office. I then flew to Kagera to embark upon a 2 day programme of visits to education and health partners in this region. Unfortunately as the return flight was cancelled, my scheduled travel to Pemba to visit education and health partners in Zanzibar was impossible to achieve. A last minute visit to a livelihoods partner in Kagera was substituted in this enforced stay over, before returning to Dar es Salaam to visit current partners working on gender, advocacy for smallholder farmers and two organisations where VSO has brought the partnership to a close. I was able to meet key staff from all partners, immediate beneficiaries who engaged most closely with the volunteer, volunteers themselves and ultimate beneficiaries (school students, teachers and head teachers).

I would like to thank all who helped me to understand the VSO work in Tanzania and to note the particularly efficient organisation of visits, guided by volunteers in the locality thus avoiding unnecessary drain on the time of programme staff who had earlier been alerted that for reasons of objectivity and independence, I would wish to hold discussions with partners without their presence. This report follows the standard IPR structure, which is the same for all 40 organisational reports that are being prepared in the context of DFID's 'Programme Partnership Arrangement' (PPA).

Results

Performance assessment against logframe

The country strategy clearly sets out areas where VSO Tanzania aims to contribute to the overall Tanzanian Government Poverty Reduction Strategy. Wealth creation is at the centre of development and VSO adopts a focus on promoting development of the private sector and making sure that growth sectors such as agriculture, oil and gas extraction and tourism will benefit poor and vulnerable people. Wealth created will enable these same people to pay for education and health services and the programme aims to improve access to and the quality of these. Each programme outcome is further defined in a logframe, with beneficiary numbers and performance indicators, and this is used to seek out and secure additional restricted resources for each programme area.

For Health for example this internal document³⁰⁷ describes a set of outcomes, including the learning from VSO programme experience to be used to advocate for better health policy implementation, with clear indicators to map progress. This seems to allow for outcomes delivered by VSO to be measured and contribution to national progress tracked. Overall these programme documents

³⁰⁷ Health Operational Plan M&E Framework 2012-15

provide a coherent paper trail whereby the VSO Tanzania programme plans to deliver a contribution to national priorities are clearly matched with the organisation's strategy and dimensions of change.

Annual reporting clearly links each programme sector objective and resonates strongly with the overall VSO DFID logframe. For example the health programme objective is to improve accessibility and quality of sexual, reproductive, maternal and neonatal health. Relevant activities are reported (capacity building, advocacy and awareness to improve leadership and accountability amongst health district officers, community engagement and uptake of services, in-service and pre-service training to improve health service quality). Results reported contain both numerical data and a concrete example of impact. Verifying the numbers reported in this health sector impact reporting was impossible; two health partners visited provide pre-service training to nurses who frequently take up posts elsewhere from the hospital where they receive training so any impact on these intermediate beneficiaries is not subsequently traceable to patient numbers in their place of work.³⁰⁸

The Annual Country Review (ACR) states that 4773 women and children received better services and 350 health staff were trained; this data actually comes from all 12 health partners that were surveyed to collect baseline information in 2010/11. Data from the programme office for 2011/12³⁰⁹ show that from the 5 health partners whose results were collected with the Programme Monitoring and Learning Tool (PMLT), 270 intermediate beneficiaries in health were trained and 185,494 persons reached through services delivered by these partners. This data is indeed captured in the Master Data set aggregated in VSO London but the difference between country reporting and organisation level reporting is an anomaly.

Interpreting these different results is confusing and complicated and illustrates that quantitative results reporting is not consistent and cannot be verified. The ACR reports only on figures about which the team can be confident since all health partners were surveyed, but they do not relate to the year in question and are likely to have changed. The team made an internal calculation based on a pro rata assumption that each partner contributes an equal number of intermediate and ultimate beneficiaries and by this simple multiplication made some attempt to verify whether the programme is 'on track' to targets set³¹⁰. However they fully acknowledge that the logic used to try to verify overall performance against targets is not strong and so report only figures that can be confidently verified at programme level. This caution is commendable and in this current year 2012/13 it will be possible when all partners are covered to report more accurately.

The Annual Report from VSO London to DFID is based upon results from the small 5 partner sample, aggregated across the world and is taken to seriously under-report achievements because all partners have not been sampled. This is obvious in a general sense, however the detail of the large increase at ultimate beneficiary level within this health sector³¹¹ strongly suggests that there are errors of consistency within the system of gathering, checking and aggregating quantitative results.

³⁰⁸ Visits to one hospital and one health management team on Pemba expected to allow some cross checking of how patient records are kept and cumulative numbers aggregated, were impossible because of flight cancellation.

³⁰⁹ 2011 Baseline Targets for 2012 against 2012 Actuals

³¹⁰ This shows, despite the uncertain logic within this mathematical calculation, that if all partner in **the whole VSO Tanzania programme** had been included in 2011/12 results collection, the **overall** intermediate beneficiary target is likely to have been exceeded (by 12%) but the ultimate beneficiary target is likely to have been underachieved (by 47%). This conclusion still masks the detail of contributions at intermediate beneficiary level from the different programmes with health and education delivering less than targets and secure livelihoods contributing more.

³¹¹ 4773 – data from 12 partners to 185,494 – data from just 5 partners within the Tanzania programme only

Effects on poor and marginalised groups and civil society

Step 8: Poor and marginalised people have improved lives

Children in Tanzania lack basic reading and numeracy skills with roughly half of primary school leavers unable to read in English and therefore unable to make the transition to secondary level where English is the main teaching language.³¹² VSO has been involved in delivery of education throughout its 50 year involvement in Tanzania, providing classroom teachers, working on teachers' methodology, producing pedagogic materials and most recently on schools management and community engagement with schools. In Zanzibar, VSO and others conducted participatory research into the reasons behind a decline in the quality of education on the islands. The findings from this research³¹³ underpin and strengthen the design of the current VSO education programme that has as one objective, to improve the quality of teaching in pre-primary, primary and lower secondary education so that every child enjoys his/her rights to access quality education and that every schools meets every civil social, intellectual and emotional needs.

In Kagera region, VSO has provided a series of volunteers to strengthen the teaching of maths and English from as early as 2007, supplemented by work with school committees and on gender mainstreaming. These inputs have not been delivered as part of a programme and in the past there has been little continuity from one volunteer to any replacement. Work with Bukoba Rural District Council (BRC) is now 'packaged' as a project based on learning from the last 4 years work, with VSO seeking funding to consolidate delivery, expecting the BRC to scale up by applying their vision of quality education to all schools in the district. This suggests a better quality of analysis and programmatic thinking that is likely to deliver greater impact.

Work to date has focused on 31 of the 146 primary schools, selected for their proximity to the District Education Office of BRC. Activities include workshops³¹⁴ on interactive teaching methods and use of local materials to produce learning aids, on teaching of English and a shift to a whole school approach to school management, teacher motivation and work with School Committees to involve the community in the smooth functioning of the school. Reporting on the impact of methodology workshops by teachers met was varied. Some felt little impact³¹⁵ while another³¹⁶ had learned to use teaching aids and was now working as a Trainer of Trainers (or Champion Teacher) working with teachers in other schools to improve the teaching of English. One head teacher valued the contributions of VSO volunteers since no in-service training is provided by Ministry of Education, even when the curriculum is changed or new subjects introduced³¹⁷ and the work with parents committees clearly served as a means to address some of the underfunding of the education service that has become more acute since the cessation of payment of capitation grants to schools.³¹⁸

We need more (VSO's) because they don't need funds from the District.

³¹² UWEZO Are Our Children Learning? Annual Learning Assessment Report 2010 cited in VSO Tanzania ACR

³¹³ Leading Learning a report on effective school leadership and quality education in Zanzibar (2012)

³¹⁴ One day or sometimes one week long

³¹⁵ "It was similar to what we had done in college"; " Maybe they were recalling our minds so we can be updated but there was no difference to the way we were teaching before" (2 teachers from Kilaini primary school)

³¹⁶ Hildegard Manyanga

³¹⁷ Such as introduction of vocational skills, domestic science (from 2009)

³¹⁸ 2012

(And on advocacy) I would like VSO to speak up on my behalf
Ward Education Coordinator Alexander Adrian Mutarewa

Overall Government funding for education services is still severely insufficient. In remote village schools it is not uncommon to find 2 teachers for 300 pupils; there is no teacher housing; the community frequently builds their own classrooms; since the end of capitation grant payments parents are forced to contribute for chalks – or have switched their contributions of maize for school feeding programmes that all expect to improve student learning, towards monies for basic materials³¹⁹. In this context VSO seems to be plugging gaps that need to be filled but there is little indication of sustainable systems building. The move towards a focused programme, where expected impact at district level is tangible will allow, in future, for the potential of a successful model to be taken to scale by other donors and Government.

We know pupils have developed through their results
Head Teacher Nyakato Primary School

Notwithstanding this challenge, the impact of VSO's work in target schools is felt in terms of pupil results and the evidence chain for this was clear and verifiable³²⁰. If completing primary education is a first step towards moving on to secondary level and improved life chances, VSO has made a clear contribution to results in the 31 target schools. While this in itself contributes to the raised District average, the approach to school leadership by Head Teachers and the monitoring and mentoring of teachers has been particularly championed by the District Education Officer, so it is highly likely that there has also been some wider impact from VSO's contribution. I conclude that there has been verifiable impact, with the potential for longer term contribution to life chances, for the children in target schools specifically and for children in the primary schools of this rural district more generally.

Effect on civil society and marginalised groups

The ACR also reports on several advocacy activities that support civil society becoming better able to hold governments to account and resulting in better development and implementation of pro-poor policies. The logframe³²¹ records a particularly impressive example, about the government's commitment to small farmers. The organisation concerned, the Agricultural Non State Actors Forum (ANSAF) is a network of CSO and private sector organisations (PSO) established in 2006 to explore best practices in the agricultural sector and make policy proposals to government, donor and other development agencies to act on problematic areas. VSO was a founder member and so assumes

³¹⁹ Interview with Ward Education Coordinator

³²⁰ In 2 primary schools visited there were results displayed listing number of students enrolled in Standard 7 and number passing this P7 exam (from 2006 to 2011 academic years). These same percentage pass rates are found in comprehensive listing of results across all 31 target schools, obtained in each year by that particular volunteer from the Statistics Officer Bukoba Rural Council. Therefore we conclude consistency between individual results information given to pupils at school level and consolidated figures across the district. In many cases these show a year on year improvement in pass rates for 2009, 2010 and 2011 academic years. There are some exceptions and 7 schools show no improvement in pass rate or negative progress over the 3 year period. Project schools pass rates are 11%-12% better than the districts year on year though the district also shows year on year improvement in pass rate. The district came from a low base, with pass rate 15% lower than the National Average in 2009, but in 2010 and 2011 has exceeded this national average by 7% and 5% respectively.

³²¹ Page 10: "VSO partner petition persuades Tanzanian Government to make new commitments to farmers"

some contribution to subsequent actions. ANSAF has been supported by inputs from one short term volunteer³²² and one political volunteer³²³ who contributed analysis of existing policies.³²⁴ While the ACR states that a petition from this VSO partner has persuaded Government to make new commitments to farmers the reality is a little different. ANSAF developed collaboration with ONE³²⁵ as a result of meeting in South Africa. ONE was lobbying at African Union level for implementation of commitments made³²⁶ to commit 10% of national budgets to the agriculture sector and was looking for a first country case to petition governments on agriculture policy. ONE gathered 17,000 signatures to a petition via their website; VSO Tanzania helped to gather another 1200 signatures in Tanzania. Via a contact within the African Development Bank, a date was identified and this petition presented to the Head of State protesting at the lack of investment that targets the poorest regions and smallholder farmers within the agriculture sector. This event³²⁷ received good media coverage and was seen as ground breaking, with positive noises made by the Head of State.

No one will doubt the commitment by Government to the sector, but it's about the practice. It is not the value of the money that is committed but where it is invested.
ANSAF Executive Director Audax Rukonge

The allocation of national budget to agriculture has indeed grown, from 52 Billion Tanzanian shillings in 2001/1 to 926 Billion in 2011/12³²⁸ but 41% is allocated to economically better off regions; 43% to intermediate level regions and just 16% to the poorest regions. As a source of stimulus for growth in agricultural production (which contributes 24% of GDP) and to smallholder farmer income the reallocation at district level remains problematic. Small farmers remain obliged to buy inputs from private sector suppliers, which are expensive or to depend on subsidised inputs distributed via Government mechanisms and these are often delivered late or are counterfeit. Currently stakeholders appear to be waiting to see whether having secured high level interest and the attention of the Head of State, this gain will be translated into reallocation and disbursement of resources in favour of smallholder farmers at district level and within the poorer districts.

In conclusion VSO has contributed to the creation and current capacity of ANSAF which has recently been able to make a significant move in lobbying at the highest level for attention to the challenges confronting smallholder farmers. This is not solely attributable to VSO and has yet to yield 'new commitments to farmers' but is nevertheless a very promising example of contributions to civil society advocacy capacity.

Relevance

Representativeness and targeting strategy

Step 1: identification of global and geographical priorities and development of global and national strategies

³²² 2 x 6mth inputs in 2010 from one volunteer on systems, policies, finance and HR systems for the organisation

³²³ MP

³²⁴ A third volunteer placed for 2yrs left after just 2 weeks citing problems with the climate in Dar es Salaam

³²⁵ ONE.org the advocacy organisation fronted by Bono

³²⁶ Maputo 2003

³²⁷ 1st March 2012

³²⁸ Figures provided by ANSAF, unchecked

The first step in the VSO Value Chain analysis relates to poverty trends and national poverty. VSO Tanzania strategy identifies key development challenges (with human resource shortages and poor quality of primary and secondary education being close to the organisation's mission) and growing levels of poverty fuelled by rapid population growth. The decision to stay in Tanzania is informed by analysis of data captured within the Country Profile sheet³²⁹ that highlights Tanzania's LDC status, the potential for in country funding and general levels of volunteer and staff satisfaction. We assume that completing this excel form will have taken no more than a few hours and is thus both efficient and economical.

It is less clear that it is effective tool to address the question relevant to this step in the value chain, of where VSO can add the greatest development impact with best value for money. Evidence of impact of aid for Tanzania over the past decade is not considered; despite relying heavily on foreign aid³³⁰ the country performs less well than other East African neighbours. For VSO to make a meaningful contribution to overall development progress there should be clear evidence that capacity is a key problem (rather than corruption and the culture of assistance³³¹ for example) and there may therefore be an overall design issue in this excel sheet (which makes it a worldwide rather than a Tanzanian issue). The history of Ujaama³³² has left an enduring attitude towards foreign influence and during this visit distrust of volunteers and their presence at community level was mentioned several times.³³³

Surprisingly there is little evidence from 50 years work in Tanzania that VSO can add development impact³³⁴.

Although there is strong anecdotal evidence, we lack hard factual data (about impact). We don't have this in most projects, both education and health projects, although the former is slightly easier since VSO has a greater role.
Regional Director Horn and East Africa

Throughout the period 1961-2005 a 'scattergun' approach to direct service delivery without a clear focus on any particular regions or issue was the norm (across the organisation and within VSO Tanzania programme). Since 2005 there has been some move towards a more programmatic approach with more precise goals and a strategy focused on education, health and livelihoods. However after 50 years investment in Tanzania, through more than 2200 volunteers working with over 500 partners, VSO's direct impact is difficult to measure³³⁵. There has been no mapping of what other professional volunteering services are available or comparison of costs. Therefore we can only conclude that VSO is as yet unable to demonstrate that it offers the 'greatest development impact with best value³³⁶ for money'.

³²⁹ Completed January 2011 Douglas Taylor

³³⁰ Country context section of VSO Tanzania Strategy

³³¹ Mentioned in Message from Country Director ACR 2011/12

³³² The philosophy of self reliance expounded by Nyerere as First President of Tanzania

³³³ By several volunteers and VSO staff; not however by partners so this may be an enduring myth

³³⁴ This was also the case for education work over many years in Ghana, so Tanzania is merely an illustrative example of the problem

³³⁵ VSO Tanzania Strategy 2012-16

³³⁶ We note that project proposals (eg. Improving the Quality of Learning in Primary Schools) state that the unit cost of a volunteer is significantly cheaper than the equivalent inputs from an international staff. VSO Tanzania costs an international volunteer at £29,000 over 2 years comparing this with a £30,000 annual salary of an international aid worker and this suggests value for money where the skill match is good, the partner's critical capacity gap is indeed related to skills, and the volunteer completes a full 2 year contract.

Step 2: identification of key partners in line with the regional/country strategies

Despite being an early adopter of the PPP, the Tanzania country strategy was not fully signed off until February 2012³³⁷ and the process thus took a whole year to reach completion. Overall the exercise is judged useful by the country team:

The strategic exercise helped us realise that it is equally important to build management skills of health and education leaders, as well as the skill gaps/capacity gaps (at service delivery level) Programme Manager VSO Programme

A number of outcomes from the process are already shaping some evolution in key partners. The realisation expressed above of the need to partner strategically with those able to influence wider levels of service delivery or policy implementation is one. A mapping of others working in Zanzibar led to a refocus from Unguja (where there are many actors) to Pemba (where there are less). Poverty indicators affirm the decision to retain a focus on Kagera, Mtwara and Zanzibar regions; and a decision was taken to withdraw from Dodoma region though this was more to do with uncommitted partners. There is clear intent to capture the value from volunteer work at community level and to feed this towards organisations working on policy research and advocacy – thus programme partners will not necessarily have a volunteer placed with them, but there will be collaboration on development issues.

The overall strategic aim is thus to focus on work in two districts in each of these three regions in order to be able to demonstrate impact from the holistic approach (via wealth creation to enabling poor people to access health and education services) that is described in the new strategy. There is a deliberate attempt to move from placements to project focus where a collection of volunteers working on complementary aspects will be managed by VSO to deliver against clear outcomes for target beneficiaries.³³⁸ Such focus on pilot areas is expected to deliver more demonstrable impact and provide a model for others to bring to scale. However, given the decline in assured funding from the DFID Strategic Grant, VSO Tanzania already recognises that they are likely to divert from this vision where donor funded opportunities present.

This model is a clear framework and brings a reassuring focus on impact at beneficiary level; although it seems to be a continuation of the programme approach that has been described by VSO since 2005 and already implemented in some countries in some programmes.³³⁹ From a reading of the current strategy in Tanzania and the way in which this is explained it would appear that ‘the programmatic approach’ encouraged and described by the organisation for some time has not always been adopted, and that where this is now taking a very definite shape this is because of the clarity of vision and focus on development impact expressed by the individual country director, coupled with an ability to design coherent development programmes, using volunteers as a principal input, and to raise funds in country to deliver these.

There are tensions apparent within this new way of programming. Amongst the 8 partners visited³⁴⁰ in 7 cases, it was clear why a volunteer with skills to share had been deployed to these organisations. Each partner seemed able to gain something from the experience and skills offered by the volunteer,

³³⁷ At Africa Regional meeting Pretoria; although the country programme had for some time proceeded to implement this draft strategy

³³⁸ For example within a project concept to work on vocational training for youth on the periphery of oil/gas mining areas that 500 young people would secure employment

³³⁹ Such as VSO Rwanda Disability Programme – Realising the Rights of Disabled People

³⁴⁰ Including 2 partners where the partnership had been brought to a close

although this was not always sustained (as evidenced by requests for a replacement volunteer) and impact of any improved partner capacity was not always traceable through to improved lives of their beneficiaries. While the organisation was driven by targets for numbers of volunteers deployed, such impact at individual partner level appears to have been deemed 'good enough.'

If there is a genuine shift towards programming of project pilots able to demonstrate impact at community level which could then be scaled up by others, there appear to be two immediate and critical challenges for VSO. Firstly demonstrating development impact requires ongoing qualitative assessment of project impact over and above the substantial investment that VSO has already made into quantifying inputs and outputs, and self assessment of service quality scales.

The second tension is already apparent: in planning of development interventions it is crucial to assess the critical capacity gaps and these are frequently other than a skill or system weakness that a skilled volunteer may work on. "It is astonishing that we had no budget for activities, or M&E such that then you can convince Government that this approach will deliver impact³⁴¹" – this is being addressed by the enormous efforts made to secure project funds in country. However it is also true that more input does not equal more impact; in this case more volunteers do not necessarily equal greater impact. Rather that the careful management of a team of strategically deployed volunteers, addressing critical skill or systems weaknesses, will require more time and attention from Programme Managers. There are frequent instances of pressures upon country programmes that run counter to a focus on achieving sustainable impact³⁴² and these tensions do not appear to be resolved.

Effectiveness

Learning

Evidence for operational learning systems is rather mixed. There are clearly gaps in an organisational system for capturing and retaining learning within a country programme.³⁴³ The evaluation was referred to staff who have moved within the organisation³⁴⁴ in an attempt to verify a 12% increase in profit reported³⁴⁵ for farmers involved in coffee production and targeted by the livelihoods partner Kolping. Although work had clearly been done to improve coffee grading and to organise farmers in 5 villages to sell directly to the National Coffee Board the partner staff could not describe to what extent this had improved farmer income; nor does the PMLT capture any data on increased income. It is logical to assume that increased yield and direct sales would improve household income, but with some crops a prolific yield may drive a fall in price and no one was able to show impact either way. It is unsatisfactory to be looking outside the country office to verify any learning that has departed with the individual concerned. Taken with the finding on lack of learning after 50 years investment in the education sector, this suggests that VSO does not have good systems for staff handover and capturing institutional learning. This will now change with the new online monitoring and learning tool that VSO Tanzania are setting up that will be operational in November 2012.

³⁴¹ Discussion with Country Director on impact of past investments into education sector work

³⁴² "Some people felt it (Country Strategy) was not ambitious enough as the number of international volunteers stayed constant" discussion with Country Director. "During the Strategic Planning process the instruction was to plan for as many (volunteers) as possible" discussion with Programme Manager Health. Corporate Business Plan April 2011-March 2014 sets international volunteer targets to rise from 1000 to 1500 (a 50% increase).

³⁴³ As described under Step 1 of the VSO Value Chain above

³⁴⁴ From Tanzania to Laos

³⁴⁵ VSO Annual Report to DFID 2011/12

On a more positive note the work funded by Accenture/CIDA/GTZ on livelihoods, market chain analysis and making markets work for the poor has clearly informed the programme's approach that is now being adopted for all sectors. The way in which a collection of partners in the ZEST project were managed by one volunteer effectively operating as Project Manager has been used to create the model now proposed, for every volunteer to belong to a project, working in a team to deliver the expected results framed by a specific project/programme logframe for that sector.

The programme office has also demonstrated considerable initiative in taking steps to deliver³⁴⁶ a bespoke system that will, once completed, allow the Programme Office to consolidate different logframes and track the different partners' placements and their contributions towards funded project objectives and overall programme goals (sector results). This retains a clear focus on results expected although these may be derived from a number of logframes as sub-components are funded by different donors (with DFID SGA being just one of these) thus enabling the office to have a single M&E system that is more detailed and fit for purpose for the different programmes.³⁴⁷

Innovation

The ACR gives a number of examples of innovative interventions:

- ZEST project in Zanzibar (linking 11 partners together under the same project);
- Use of low cost triage system for neo-natal care in Lindi region ;
- Use of mobile phone technology for birth registration;
- Use of champion teachers to improve quality of education and motivation of teachers.

DFID reported that they are seriously considering use of funds from an Innovation Fund, managed in country to scale up the good practice demonstrated through the maternal and neonatal triage system developed by a volunteer paediatrician at St. Walburg hospital, Nyangao, Lindi region. This involves a simple checklist used to assess and monitor neonatal vital signs – a step change from assuming that a completed delivery is 'safe delivery.' Fatality rates for neonatal admissions fell from 41.2 per 1000 to 28.5 per 1000 live births; from 20% amongst admissions to this hospital to 12.6%, and as word spread through the community and health workers of these success rates there have been increased referrals and a 2.5 fold increase in neonatal admissions.

This is an important innovation for Tanzania and for the health sector in country which the partnership and good relationship between VSO and DFID in country is likely to bring to scale.

Partnership working

I am not 100% sure when VSO will stop our partnership; we discuss sustainability but there is a national shortage of medical teaching staff
Member of Rubya Hospital Management team

It was clear from the range of partners visited that whether partnering with Government or civil society groups VSO is working with organisations whose capacity varies across a spectrum. Some placements address a capacity gap for as long a volunteer is in place and subsequent repeat requests illustrate this persistent need³⁴⁸ since there is a national shortage in the given skill areas. Others³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ with a company which develops software for international development agencies Envaya, San Francisco

³⁴⁷ such as that for work on Girls Education which if funded by DFID will require reporting to detailed project level indicators on completion and drop out rates

³⁴⁸ Rubya Hospital Nursing School; Mugana Hospital Nursing School; FEMINA

³⁴⁹ Human Development Trust

have likewise benefitted from a series of volunteers³⁵⁰ but are now judged to have increased capacity and breadth of partnerships to an extent where VSO support is no longer justifiable. Partnership with Government is more delicate: sometimes “we capture their attention at Ministry level by giving them a volunteer that they want”³⁵¹ and then use this relationship to understand more specific and strategic capacity gaps, also using the partnerships with Ministries to feed back learning gathered from volunteer experiences at community level.³⁵² There is a good sense of collaboration with VSO and the organisation’s long track record in Tanzania was recognised at a high level³⁵³ during celebrations of 50 yrs Independence and VSO’s 50 yrs in country.

We have the lion’s share in deciding what is done.
Regional Education Officer – Bukoba District, Kagera Region

In the past the programme has by its own analysis not been so good at developing partnership plans and now the sector programme plan overrides individual partner plans since these may be too numerous and too onerous to complete. The new strategy focuses more on project’s impact rather than on the partners and the programme will now enter into partnership agreements to achieve larger project’s objectives rather than solely to support the partner in building its capacity. The new partnership agreements reflect this change. Updated partnership agreements are also established with joint programming partners (UN Women, UWEZO, ANSAF for example) and the Country Strategy sets out clear targets for the proportion of partners at community, district and national/regional levels and whether these are likely to come from Government or private sectors.

Sustainability

VSO have been a really good partner; very helpful in helping DFID to think about what to do in education and health. It is important to make community links work and VSO does use their volunteer’s experience in positive ways.
In terms of fund raising it is hard to compare (VSO) with Oxfam and Action Aid – those organisations have another funding base that VSO didn’t.
Deputy Head, DFID Tanzania

This section is about VSO Tanzania’s ability to generate and grow funds. As development partners move away from direct budget support or basket fund mechanisms because of poor Government performance on disbursement and use of such funds, there is a good expectation that VSO Tanzania can raise funds in country.³⁵⁴ This was confirmed by DFID staff that was able to cite a number of funded partnerships where VSO brings specific and valuable skill inputs.³⁵⁵

Comparison of two year’s data on actual income – 2010/11 & 2011/12 – shows the proportion of the country budget covered by unrestricted funding³⁵⁶ rises from 45% to 61%.³⁵⁷ A further 24% of

³⁵⁰ At least 3

³⁵¹ Discussion with Programme Managers

³⁵² For example the Leading Learning work in Zanzibar is a peg for dialogue with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training Zanzibar; and there are plans to conduct similar research on the non payment of health costs such as training allowances for nurses in training and the impact of this on health services delivery

³⁵³ Public Service Management Department within the President’s Office

³⁵⁴ Score 3 on a scale of 1 to 4

³⁵⁵ VSO – British Council work on English education; and VSO – VETA – British Council project to develop new skill areas around the market potential from oil and gas extraction and mining

³⁵⁶ with 85% of this figure provided by the DFID SGA

the 2011/12 budget comes from the CIDA PPA which is now in the fifth and final year (2012/13). Unrestricted funds are allocated (2011/12) as follows: 31% to staff costs; 55% to volunteer costs; 4% to premises and utilities; 3% to office costs, 3% to programme costs and 3% to equipment. Overall budget rises by 15% to £850,611 and two new donors contribute³⁵⁸ as three other funded partnerships come to an end. Another donation in country³⁵⁹ is not captured in data from London and Programme Office finance figures reflect a slightly lower overall budget.³⁶⁰

Although the Tanzania programme benefitted from some restricted funds prior to the People First strategy³⁶¹ there is now clearly a much stronger emphasis on securing programme funds. The country director mentioned several times that about 50% of programme staff time is spent on fund raising with 3 to 4 people working full time throughout July and August on this. This is positive and likely to lead to reduced dependency upon DFID SGA, though the delivery and management of an increasingly varied portfolio of funded projects, including the timely delivery of required technical volunteers into these is not without challenges.

We are seen as a real development partner, for example we took the lead in a consortium application (involving the Aga Khan Foundation, the Aga Khan University and the British Council) on the DFID Girls Education project
VSO Country Director

Scaling back dependency upon DFID DGA funds

VSO Tanzania finance team provided figures that demonstrate the potential for positive outcomes from this effort.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Unrestricted funds from VSO London	479,000	418,000	481,000
Total Programme budget	886,000	781,000 ³⁶²	1,362,000
Balance provided by x donors	5	7	11
Proportion of budget from restricted income	46%	46%	65%

Efficiency and value for money assessment

Overall the Tanzania office's performance seemed extremely professional and efficient; information was provided rapidly, logistics for this visit arranged and re-arranged very effectively; and volunteers indeed (as the ACR mentions) treated as equal professionals taking responsibility for hosting my visits and obviating the need for Programme office staff to accompany me. Staff satisfaction went up significantly over the past year³⁶³ and this seems to be an indication of clear vision from the country

³⁵⁷ Figures provided by VSO London show this percentage 10% higher than figures obtained in Programme Office (51%) this is because London provided budget data whilst the Programme Office works on actual expenditure and income realised

³⁵⁸ British Council and Cordaid

³⁵⁹ From British Gas

³⁶⁰ £818,731

³⁶¹ Accenture funds covered costs of volunteers in livelihoods project, albeit with limited additional costs for other project inputs such as training, production inputs or guarantee funds for access to credit

³⁶² Annual report 2011/12 updates this figure is given as £719,294 (42% restricted) – thus actual expenditure was less than expected and the proportion from restricted income subsequently slightly lower

³⁶³ ACR page 6

leadership, involvement of many staff in regular programme management, good supervision processes all of which are indications of good V4M. Narrative reporting to donors was completed on time although changes within the finance team, a gap with no finance officer and the organisation's migration in accounting systems³⁶⁴ meant that financial reporting was delayed and final submissions were late. Significant cost savings have been made and there was ample indication³⁶⁵ of cost consciousness within this office.

VSO core rationale is the value chain which explains the steps taken to deliver the outputs and outcomes expected; this part of the review examines the following steps in this chain in this country programme.

Step 3: development of individual partnership plans

The Paths to Partnership Manual developed around the time of the merger with CUSO because of CPPA focus on quality of partnerships as one reporting output, is seen to place undue value on the quality of the partnership over the impact from the collaboration. VSO in Tanzania conducts assessments of 90%³⁶⁶ of partner's capacity using a highly participatory assessment tool. The BCCD (Building Concept for Capacity Development) tool has evolved from collaboration between VSO and Randstad and has been used across organisations ranging from Ministry of Health in Pemba to small livelihood CSO. It appears to be regularly applied, easily facilitated by volunteers, not onerous in terms of time required³⁶⁷, to deliver pragmatic action planning to address capacity challenges and to create a strong sense of ownership.

Discussions around the placement of a volunteer use similar participatory methods to identify expectations (from employer and from VSO) of what the volunteer will do, with a focus brought to areas of overlap. Programme Managers however take 99% of the responsibility for developing placement documentation; and for deciding what type of volunteer³⁶⁸ should be sought. The process is negotiated over as little as 2 to 3 weeks or as long as 6 months.

There is little scope for many alternatives to volunteers to be considered although this is a key requirement for achieving maximum V4M. VSO offers volunteers or knowledge sharing³⁶⁹ and in the past this was most often given to existing partners rather than to potential partners, or non-partner collaborating organisations. Discussion of V4M and Economy³⁷⁰ are framed by this single operating model and Programme Managers do not explicitly consider any cost benefit consideration in bringing in short term over longer term volunteers – the skill requirements are the primary criteria. To this end the move towards projects with external funding will allow VSO to respond more creatively “being as good in strategic programming as in volunteer delivery and support.”³⁷¹ The programme is increasingly able to partner with organisations without necessarily bringing volunteers to them; alternatively now being able to offer much more than just international volunteers.

Partnership agreements are not the norm, these are not yet in place for most partners but will become the starting point for new partnerships as the country strategy is implemented. In the past exit strategy has not been defined at the start of a partnership though the new strategy envisions

³⁶⁴ Upgrade from SUN4 to SUN5 with a one month timelag to retrieve consolidated data from London

³⁶⁵ Land travel policy; sub-letting office space; standard of accommodation selected for visiting staff

³⁶⁶ Discussion with Programme Managers

³⁶⁷ A series of structured discussions over a 2 mth period was the maximum mentioned

³⁶⁸ STV; LTV; political volunteer etc

³⁶⁹ In form of organised study visit or invitations to other stakeholder gatherings, providing information

³⁷⁰ Costs of inputs and resources of an intervention

³⁷¹ Vision section of VSO Tanzania Strategy – Doing Development Differently

partnership of up to 5 yrs with a more hardnosed review of impact achieved before making further commitments. The format for these partnership agreements now focus more on project objectives rather than on placement and job descriptions, reflecting the development nature of partnerships.

Step 4: VSO recruits and prepares suitable volunteers in line with the partnership plans

Principal responsibility for this link in the value chain lies elsewhere with VSO Tanzania effectively the customer. In 2011/12 there were 57 Volunteer arrivals (40 LT and 17 ST), against 63 planned – a 90% fill rate. There were 11 early returns (19%); 7 of these were due to ‘lack of volunteer motivation’³⁷² where issues with the climate, the employing organisation and psychological problems were cited as reasons for premature return and suggest insufficient rigour in the assessment and preparation stages. 4 others felt that the partners had not readied accommodation for them; requests are always initiated by the partner and this reflects a contextual reality which might have been accommodated by more flexible, mature understanding of this; however these volunteers were redeployed to other partners in country so have no impact on early return rate. These departures bring the actual fill rate down to 79% with cost implications.

There is an issue for pre departure training as, in line with the strategy and programme approach, it is for volunteers to understand that they must work to deliver the project objectives defined by the logframe. This is a slight departure from any previous iterative job redefinition as per evolving partner needs or as these are reassessed by a volunteer being an expert in their field. Health sector postings have traditionally been hard to fill particularly clinical jobs. There is now an agreement with Peace Corps in Tanzania to place this type of volunteer recruited by them into VSO programmes – an interesting departure that raises two issues for monitoring i) will quality and volunteer preparation be of an acceptable standard ii) whether VSO will include such volunteers in programme management in all other ways (paying allowances and counting them as international long term volunteers provided as inputs for example).

In addition the livelihoods programme has at times waited for 2 years for technical volunteers (such as Agro engineers) to be sourced; vocational training specialists particularly with teaching skills are hard to recruit. It is felt that demand exceeds VSO ability to meet the need and if this type of volunteer is required for restricted funding programmes³⁷³ late delivery could jeopardise work done to secure funding, plan and deliver programmes. This reality presents a significant challenge to growing an essential component of the holistic approach to development of target communities.

Step 5: Volunteers work with partners in country

Without exception partners met were highly appreciative of the quality, experience and attitudes demonstrated by the volunteers in post and also expressed a sense of control from making the final selection from candidate choices. Employers assess volunteer performance by judging results.³⁷⁴

She is very present with students on the ward, very attentive to their performance
Head of Nurse Tutors, Mugana Hospital

In both areas education and health there was some evidence for sustainable improvement in organisational effectiveness of partners supported. The approach to whole school management and support for Head Teachers was evidently endorsed and actively supported by a particularly active Regional Education Officer in Kagera region – although one might fear that the good results achieved

³⁷² ACR page 3

³⁷³ Such as that proposed for the oil/gas mining areas

³⁷⁴ Such as trainee nurses no longer are failing on the practical elements of their examinations; and observation of pupils seeking out appointments with VSO nurse tutors.

‘on his watch’ may lead to a promotion out of this area. In Rubya hospital a very clear timetable developed by the volunteer of subjects, allocations between theory and practice with tutor allocations was prominently displayed on the wall of the nurse tutor team staff room. The programme has plans to strengthen accountability between partners, governments and communities through specific action research to highlight where implementation does not match policy commitments.³⁷⁵

Step 6: Partner organisations are strengthened sustainably

The role of VSO Tanzania will therefore not concentrate anymore on supporting partners to “learn and change” but instead working with them to achieve the results of a specific project. That will of course include capacity building, but the focus will be less on partner capacities than on the impact it has on final beneficiaries.

ACR – page 3

This is a key remark as it underscores the belief that partners do not necessarily need to learn and change; if they participate actively in their own capacity assessments, identify areas to address and seek VSO support for some of these this breeds a constructive collaboration that is focused on (ultimate) beneficiary impact rather than a partnership that frequently progresses no further than some element of skill sharing or skills provision to intermediate beneficiaries (frequently staff). Currently it is not possible to assess whether partners are strengthened sustainably and if so what proportion reach this standard. The repeat placement of volunteers reflects a variety of scenes: sometimes another with a slightly different skill set will be placed in a good partner; at others there is a dearth of skills at national level³⁷⁶ so volunteers have been placed in succession. It is also highly likely that in the push to place international volunteers (the number based targeting) some volunteers are requested for other reasons other than to strengthen a skill based capacity gap³⁷⁷.

VSO employs a version of the BRIDGE tool (BCCD) used in capacity assessment that relates to partners and their approach to gender issues. This is applied to some partners where the serving volunteer applies for a grant from the gender fund to perform this participatory gender audit, and subsequently integrate gender activities into the activities of the organisation. Use is optional following opt-in, although programme managers are now beginning to lead on the use of the tool in programme sectors. Thus there appears to be some movement towards a position where gender equality will be more mainstreamed in all partnerships.

In addition VSO supports FEMINA a fairly high profile multi-media organisation with a focus on gender equality and citizens’ engagement as a key strategic partner working on gender. The partnership was begun 6 years ago and illustrates a strong core partner, with shared values, working on important issues and achieving excellent reach via radio, television, youth platforms and very attractive youth magazines that are distributed to every secondary school in the country. The relationship is strong, it is clear why this partner has been selected and though the organisation is well organised and run VSO still makes significant technical input (currently via a volunteer with 20 yrs experience as a TV producer).

³⁷⁵ For example research on the scale of non-payment of financial commitments from Government towards Mission hospitals that was sent to SIDA, as lead donor for the health sector basket fund.

³⁷⁶ For example skilled media production staff as the national TV industry is only 15 yrs old

³⁷⁷ The sentiment expressed in Bukoba that volunteers don’t need funds from the District; and by HDT who felt they would be able to get a Tanzanian with fundraising competency but a living wage would exceed the cost of a VSO’s accommodation and allowance [NB this placement has not proceeded as the partnership has completed]

Step 7: As a result strengthened partner organisations are better able to deliver quality basic services and hold Government to account

Baseline data was gathered in 2011 from all 45 partners, aggregated data in 2012 was returned from 30 partners but for varied reasons 15 partners only were included in the master data set used for reporting to DFID. The monitoring system, cross referenced to the partners selected for visits serves to illustrate so systems issues.

In health it has not been possible to verify data collected via the M&E system as visits to Pemba where 2 of the 5 contributing health partners are, were forced to be cancelled. Both used the health scale to make a facilitated self assessment of service quality and ranked their advocacy work, on scaling up mobile community outreach services, at 4 the point where the issue is being discussed and debated in the public realm. Since this assessment of quality was conducted for the first time in this year it is not yet possible to ascertain whether the partners consider themselves stronger and more importantly that the quality of services to health care users have improved. This will be possible in the final review although it is important to note the observation of Health Programme Manager on the newly published final health quality scale:

Views of the institution and the community's views often differ. Using the Quality Scale involves coming to a shared understanding – like guessing where you are. (The complexity of the new scale) means it would take a week to do – which the hospital cannot afford nor can we as staff.

Among education partners 5 contributed data to organisational M&E; 1 partner could not be visited for the same reason above. Bukoba Rural Council assessed quality of education services using the education scale in both baseline year and 2011/12 but the result shows regression (from 3 to 2.67) both missing the target for 2012 (3) and making negative progress. This has to be taken in the round, with the variable impact reporting by staff concerned³⁷⁸ and the overall improvement of pupil pass rates in the district. This seems to illustrate precisely the problems that were flagged by the M&E team in London: the self assessment process is subjective; outcomes depend on the skills and integrity of the facilitator; different respondents may be involved from one year to the next bringing uncontrollable variation in answers; and even where the same core group takes part from one year to the next there has been a natural tendency to be positive in the first round, and more realistic in subsequent rounds. Alternatively, from field assessment, this negative progress could very well reflect that services have deteriorated with the ending of the capitation grant from Government and longer term impacts upon teacher morale. In conclusion VSO does not appear to have an objective, independently verifiable system for knowing that partner organisations have indeed been strengthened.

Impact and value for money of SGA funding

SGA funding has mostly been used to fill gaps in the budget covering costs of staff providing support for the whole programme and covering costs of volunteers. The impact of the SGA funding has been one of scale rather than depth, without this contribution VSO would be doing the same things but with fewer volunteers and in particular fewer volunteers placed in Government institutions that are less able or willing to cover allowances.

³⁷⁸ Reported under Step 8 of the value chain

'Unrestricted' funds provided through the DFID SGA covered 38% of the Programme Office budget in 2011/12 and were allocated as a proportion of the total programme budget to staff costs (16%); Volunteer costs (28%); premises and utilities (2%); office costs (1.5%); travel (1%) and equipment (2%). The programme office now understands³⁷⁹ that in 2013/14 it can be assured of unrestricted funds to cover the cost of one programme manager and some 15% of rent and utilities. Any further funds have to be raised in country or bid for (in competition with other programmes in the region) from unrestricted funds managed from VSO London.

Concluding Remarks

The VSO Tanzania programme was the most promising of the three countries visited in Africa; although it was disappointing to find little learning from 50 years investment in the education sector³⁸⁰ and generally weak mechanisms for learning about any improvement in partner capacity in the past or impact in specific sectors. These weaknesses in parts of the value chain (notably around assessment of impact on the capacity of partner organisations and whether this translates into better services for their target beneficiaries) is critical and undermines the VSO Theory of Change.

There are some promising signs that this situation is likely to be addressed. The Strategic planning exercise has led to a clear overall approach for the country that resonates with National Development priorities. This is underpinned by detailed sector logframes with clear outcomes and expectations of benefit for community level beneficiaries which provide a clear framework for assessing future impact of VSO work. There are small scale examples in both health and education where impact achieved is noticeable and this gives the potential for such learning to be brought to scale by others. The team has effective leadership with strong vision and a good relationship with other development partners (notably DFID but also Peace Corps, British Council and others). The effort dedicated to raising restricted funds provides an opportunity to do more than just provide skills through volunteers; it will be important that other parts of the organisation deliver volunteers with the required areas of expertise and adequate preparation for the realities of working, as a team, in Tanzanian conditions if these efforts are to be followed by the effective delivery of the programmes designed.

³⁷⁹ Interview with Programme Support Manager backed by figures from Finance Manager

³⁸⁰ The role of VSO was for many years just filling gaps providing teachers; as the sector itself has become stronger and the role of VSO shifted to supporting the Ministry and sector as a whole the current education programme has been informed by the last 5 years of learning.

Annex H: Details of the evaluation team

Lead consultant: Willem van Eekelen

Background

Willem is a development economist who worked for a range of multilateral organisations and NGOs. Most of his work has been programme-related, always in the fields of development cooperation and humanitarian work.

Currently, Willem works as an independent consultant. He specialises in change management and multi-method evaluations. In addition to his consultancy work, Willem lectures at the University of Birmingham and co-owns Green Visions, the Balkans' liveliest adventure tourism company.

Examples of relevant recent work

In 2011 and 2012 Willem evaluated DFID-funded programmes for Oxfam, Action Against Hunger, Save the Children, the Centre for International Development and Training, and the consortium of Restless Development, War Child and Youth Business International. In 2010, Willem was the lead evaluator of the PPA of Islamic Relief Worldwide, and helped develop the People In Aid PPA bid.

Willem has never before worked for, or applied to work for, VSO.

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Team member: Amisha Patel

Background

Amisha is an International Development Manager with over 12 years' experience specialising in civil society strategy, policy and programme development. She has considerable experience in programme learning, measuring impact and demonstrating value for money. Her diverse skill set include extensive project management, building collaborative networks and policy design.

Amisha began her career with the UK Department for International Development in 1998 and steadily progressed through the organisation covering a number of programme management and policy implementation roles. She has an excellent understanding of DFID programme Management procedures (including DFID Blue book) and has led on all stages of Programme Cycle Management (from Inception to Final Review). In her last role as Civil Society Specialist with DFID's Civil Society Department she initiated the Business Case for the VSO strategic grant and conducted technical evaluations of a range of DFID Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) final evaluations.

Examples of relevant recent work

Since leaving DFID in August 2011 Amisha managed the process and final bid submission of the VSO-led Consortium of the International Citizen Service Programme which was recently approved for £55M of DFID funding.

Amisha recently covered quality assurance for Progressio's and Womankind's PPA Annual Review reports. She has been part of the PPA IPR of ActionAid.

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Team member: Sue Enfield

Background

Sue is a Social Development specialist, with over 30 years of experience in design, implementation and review of development programmes. She has worked for over 16 years in Africa as a staff member of varied INGO, including VSO, and has solid experience of every stage of the project cycle and NGO organisational development.

Subsequently she has worked for a wide range of INGO and bilateral donors (including DFID on many occasions) as an M&E consultant on programme reviews, meta-evaluations and results based management. She has strong sector experience in Disability; HIV/AIDS; Education and Livelihoods and brings recent experience of work on scale up of national responses to OVC including HIV mainstreaming in programmes.

Examples of relevant recent work

- In 2007 Sue worked on review of policy implementation to deliver National Poverty Reduction objectives (with particular focus on education and vocational training initiatives in Rwanda) for DGCD - Belgian Cooperation). And on delivery of service delivery commitments made to HIV positive people, disabled people and orphans and vulnerable children (including 4 missions for DFID in Rwanda and Burundi 2008 - 2010)
- Sue has recently acted as team leader on two large evaluations to assess organisational capacity, programme impact and contribution to enhancing the national response: for Sida on an evaluation of the Church of Sweden Programme (2006-2012) to deliver Community Based Psychosocial Support across Humanitarian Assistance and for UNICEF Eastern & Southern Africa's Children & AIDS Regional Initiative where she acted as team leader for the joint DFID/AusAid Project Completion Review .

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Annex I: VSO Management Response to the findings of the Independent Progress Review

This independent review of the work of VSO comes at a very good time – at the mid point of the largest and most wide ranging programme of strategic change in VSO’s history. It is timely and helpful therefore to have this assessment of our strengths and weaknesses to act as a health check. Having analysed our work in depth, it is very heartening to see many of VSO’s strengths recognised in the report, and we welcome the insights provided in areas of weaknesses, and the practical ways forward that we feel confident to action.

We are very pleased that the report highlights a number of areas where our approach of securing development outcomes using volunteers is validated in practice. More so, the report confirms that our “value chain and theory of change are frameworks that follow a powerful logic that links action to relevant outcomes”.

This is reflected in the some strong examples identified by the evaluators where our work is contributing to deep and long-lasting impact on poor and disadvantaged communities as well as to short and longer term impact – for example, the transformation in neo natal mortality in Uganda that DFID wants to roll out regionally; the wholly changed approach to rice growing in the hills of Papua New Guinea that has contributed to better livelihoods: and the systemic improvement in education in Cambodia. We acknowledge that we could do more to promote and disseminate the successes we have achieved.

The report values these innovative initiatives and VSO’s ability to share its learning, ‘VSO is about sharing with other stakeholders, and a considerable part of this sharing seems to turn into adoption and replication of good practice and innovation’. The section of the report on Innovation is particularly encouraging especially as it highlights distinctive contributions where volunteers and partners are very effective at finding new and innovative solutions to many problems.

The focus is on our work through international volunteers, and as such, it is worth noting that in line with our strategy, we increasingly are responding to our partners needs through a diverse range of volunteering approaches; namely, national volunteers to strengthen local communities, corporate volunteers bringing private sector expertise to bear, young people acting with peers as a catalyst at the heart of development, eminent volunteers providing specialist knowledge and access to networks, and knowledge sharing nationally and internationally to facilitate partner learning.

Our most significant weakness identified in the report is in effective measurement of the impact and outcomes of our programmes. We acknowledge this, and recognise the critical importance of having robust evidence to demonstrate the value of VSO’s work to partners, donors and volunteers alike. We are currently are 12 months into a long term drive to strengthen this area, including building expert central resource to lead this work, developing sufficient capacity and skills across our country offices, and ensuring the importance and value of this work is well understood by our employees, volunteers and partners alike. Many of the comments in the report are therefore helpful in providing suggestions about how we can accelerate these changes and the priorities we might adopt. We are pleased to see that the report agrees with our view, that while we will take immediate action, and while some early wins are achievable, “*this is likely to take a few years*” to do really thoroughly. We

know it will require substantial organisational commitment and resource, and are determined that over the next 18 months our monitoring and evaluation will be immeasurably strengthened.

The report presents a mixed picture of our work with partners and its impact on the ground. Working in a programmatic way through partners, who are as often governments as community groups and NGOs, is fundamental to our theory of change. It is also central to how we contribute to systemic change which is locally owned and sustained. There are some excellent examples given of good partnership working and some examples where it has not worked as well as we would wish. Inevitably a strategy of working through partners can carry some risk of variability and we understand this. However we are committed to learning from the places where it clearly works well, and improving what we are doing in the places where it is currently less successful.

The report acknowledges the wide ranging internal transformation programme that will reduce our funding dependency on the DFID Strategic Grant to below 40%, reduce our support costs by 30%, and ensure that all the resource choices we inevitably have to make are directed by our overall goal of ending poverty. Our change programme is designed to re-align our operating model to so that it meets these criteria and that all our expenditure is focussed, strategically allocated to where we can make the most difference, and effectively performance managed. The review gives us comfort, that painful as these changes are, they are being driven through effectively and creatively. As we progress these changes we know that we must carry our people with us – and that means our staff, our volunteers, and our partners.

Our International Board of Trustees is fully engaged in this review, and the report has already been discussed by our Chair and the working group of the Board established to oversee this work more closely. The evaluator will attend our Board meeting on 29th November 2012 to present the findings directly to the Trustees. We will now prepare a detailed action plan to deal with the issues the report raises, which the Global Leadership Team will own and against which the Board will monitor progress. We have commented on each recommendation below.

Our commitment is firm and unwavering to deliver our vision in our *“People First”* strategy and to contribute to reducing and ultimately ending world poverty. In the process of learning and improving our development practice and we will not flinch from the difficult choices that have to be made to achieve this.

We thank the evaluators who have judiciously and tirelessly worked with VSO staff and trustees, our volunteers and our partners to produce this report. And finally we would like to acknowledge the continued support of DFID and all of our other partners who make our work possible.

Marg Mayne

Chief Executive

VSO

26 October 2012

VSO Initial Response to the Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - The logframe

1. *The current logframe does not provide consistently meaningful information. This is partly because of the quality of the data that fed into this logframe, and can therefore not be fixed by producing a fifth version.*
2. *Instead of reworking the logframe once again, we recommend to focus on the underpinning problem, which is the way VSO gathers data. This is partly a mentality (you need to want to do it), partly a funding and work plan issue (M&E needs to have a place in budget and time frames) and partly a matter of protocol and the documentation of choices (both global and national).*
3. *Ideally, data are gathered on an ongoing basis, but data reporting is limited to fixed times of the year. Currently, country offices are struggling with the information they have to provide. This is partly because not all offices are used to grant management and the reporting that comes with this, and partly because VSO International's demand are more frequent and variable than would be ideal (the annual reports are due in February but the last major logframe exercise, for example, was in June).*
4. *Once the underpinning problems have been resolved, it would be wise to look at the logframe again. This is likely to take a few years, and the SGA final review may not have a new and improved worldwide logframe to compare results with.*
5. *VSO and DFID have to agree on an alternative before the final reviewers start their work. Two possibilities would be to:*
 - *Find the country offices with the most robust national logframes, and ask them to prepare for a contribution analysis. These national logframes and contribution analyses could jointly form the final review's reference points.*
 - *Make an inventory of all external evaluations that have been conducted in the past few years, and utilise them to inform VSO's next SGA Annual Review.*

Recommendation 2 - M&E

VSO would benefit from a much more thorough and consistent approach to M&E, and from introducing post-closure impact evaluations. In the next few years, VSO will not be able to evaluate all of its programmes. When planning M&E activities, it may be wise to prioritise:

1. *VSO's most impressive successes. These successes could be used to learn from and for the purpose of strengthening VSO's policy contributions and marketing material.*
2. *'Mystery failures' such as the one described above, to gain deeper understanding of the variables that make or break VSO's programmes.*

VSO Response

We have acknowledged our M&E has to be improved, and this is reflected in some of the difficulties in designing an effective logframe. However the report recommends (page 56) that "VSO's reporting challenges cannot be resolved by further logframe revisions. Instead, VSO's focus should be on the development of its M&E systems. Such systems would enable the organisation to develop and populate meaningful logframes in the future". We agree that developing improved M&E systems is the way forward and the report provides helpful suggestions about how to approach this.

This work has been underway over the past year. We have created a new and expanded team to oversee this work centrally, and created four new posts to support M&E regionally. Effective M&E needs to be built into programme design from the outset, with absolutely consistent approaches adopted across the organisation. To get a truly excellent system in place therefore take a few years (as the report notes above) but this will be a very high priority for our work until it is complete. In addition, we are working to ensure that partners, volunteers and our own employees all understand the critical importance of monitoring and evaluation and are equally committed to do what is needed so that in the future we can more robustly evidence the value of the work that VSO does.

This report does find evidence of very good programmes that are making a real impact, and instances several, but we agree that it is not possible currently to evidence this impact across VSO programmes sufficiently. We are committed to changing this. More detailed plans will follow to achieve this objective and these will be monitored by the VSO International Board and the sub group established for this specific purpose.

Recommendation 3 - Learning

The introduction of multi-year partner-specific learning logs could help to ensure that learning is not lost over long periods of time.

VSO Response

We are greatly encouraged by the very positive conclusions in the report about VSO's commitment to learning – it is a key part of what we consider to be VSO's ethos, values and contribution to International development. We are, of course, keen to improve further. The recommendation from the report is a helpful and practical one and we will implement it as part of our annual review process for partners.

Recommendation 4 - Partnerships

- *Sometimes there is significant discrepancy between volunteers' Terms of Reference and the reality they find upon arrival. It might be possible to reduce this discrepancy by initiating a three-way engagement prior to the actual deployment.*
- *The chances of partnership success, and the extent of such success, would increase if country offices more consistently adhered to VSO guidance on the identification of partners and the management and M&E of partnerships.*

VSO Response

The report finds that our partnership approach works very well in some places but there is room for improvement overall to ensure the good practice is replicated everywhere. We accept this and will be working on it – our annual partner reviews are a key tool for managing this relationship and ensuring it is working well and we will be increasing the rigour with which these are implemented.

We have already commissioned an empirical study of how Country Offices are actually employing partnership guidance and tools. In the short term this will help us better understand how to improve and how to ensure best practice is embedded firmly.

We have a major project underway at the moment to fundamentally re-engineer the processes we use to recruit, train, and place volunteers, and building in appropriate three way engagement (VSO, volunteer and partner) prior to and during the placement will be a key part of the new process. This will incorporate the recommendations made here.

This leaves us with a challenge – and an opportunity. Often the very best work occurs through volunteers, with our local partners, adapting and changing the original brief to seize opportunities for change and impact that were not originally foreseen. At the same time we recognise that allowing individuals to pursue their preferences may not achieve the best development outcome. This requires careful evaluation and monitoring (which must be built in to our M&E system).

Recommendation 5 - Savings

- *Savings are best measured as a summation of both cost reductions and all cost increases that are not related to the change process.*
- *When calculating change-related investments it is good practice to distinguish between investments that are related to the implementation of change (such as a temporary HR officer who supports the restructuring process) and investments that are the consequence of change (such as a larger fundraising team), because the former cost is temporary and the latter cost is permanent.*

VSO Response

Over an 18 month period starting in mid-2010 we reduced our costs by over £6 million by introducing a number of rigorous measures and by cutting some activity. This money was then simultaneously re-invested into our fundamental and longer term change programme to support our key change objectives - increasing fundraising capacity, focussing our Country offices more clearly on long term development aims, and reducing our support service costs by 30% over the life of the current DfID SGA. These objectives are all built into the log frame and we are on course to achieve these in the timescales envisaged. We are happy to take on board as part of this process the recommendations about how these changes should be measured.

Recommendation 6 - Means and ends

- *The deployment of volunteers is not always the most appropriate and cost-effective type of support for VSO's partners. VSO has other means in stock – training and grants, for example - and would benefit from more systematically exploring them. Considering that volunteering is and will remain VSO's core business, the best possible support sometimes requires the involvement of other INGOs and stakeholders. Such possibilities could be explored more systematically, in cases where a partner might not be best served through volunteering.*

- *Numerical targets in relation to volunteer deployment may not be appropriate targets, as they lead to pressure to find many partners to place many volunteers in, rather than pressure to make an impact.*

VSO Response

We agree that volunteering is not the complete response to all development needs and is sometimes an element in a wider package of interventions. Our success must absolutely be measured by our impact on meeting development needs locally – and not just by the numbers of volunteers deployed. We are already working on joint programming with other INGO's so that they can contribute those things they specialise in. We feel strongly that that broader approach to INGO partnership to complement all our local partnerships is the right approach. It would not be sensible for VSO to attempt to deliver the whole range of interventions alone and we will not do that.

VSO also works with other volunteering interventions beyond the international volunteers that is the focus of the report. The number of international volunteer days delivered is a valuable PI for a volunteering organisation but we are very clear that that must only be one in a basket of indicators against which to measure our work (At present international volunteer indicators comprise 3 of our 26 KPI's). We agree with the recommendation therefore.



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VSO is a registered charity in England and in
Wales (313757) and in Scotland (SC039117).

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