

Evidence based case study

Youth community volunteering

VSO Bangladesh
2015



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Background note

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| Purpose | To increase understanding of how youth community volunteers contribute towards VSO development objectives |
| Project | Youth programmes Evidence Based Case Studies (EBCS) |
| Context | Efforts to document youth programmes achievements better and connect to rest of VSO's work; improve practice and guidance of how to do evidence-based case studies |
| Scope | Youth programmes, VSO Bangladesh |
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In 2014/15, the VSO Youth programmes Team commissioned four Evidence-Based Case Studies (EBCS) in Kenya, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Nepal to further understand the development results from youth programmes, and how these results have been achieved through youth volunteering. Each case study had a lead researcher and was guided by a steering group of VSO staff from country offices and VSO International. Terms of reference, research questions and research tools were designed for each. Learning and recommendations from the case studies will inform future youth programme development.

1. Summary

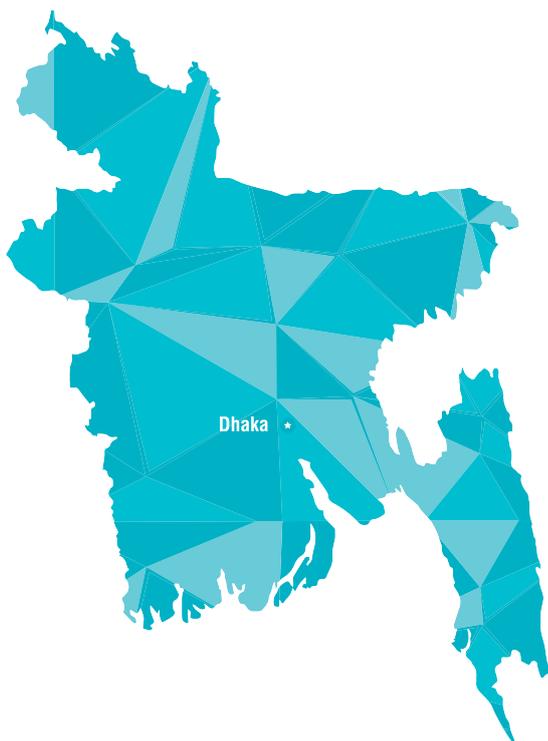
This case study explores the approach of engaging youth community volunteers in VSO Bangladesh development programmes. The case study focuses on programmes in the South West of Bangladesh. It aims to understand the outcomes of youth volunteering for community youth and how community youth volunteers are contributing towards VSO development objectives. The following research questions were developed to shape the study:

- Why and how does VSO Bangladesh engage community youths in volunteering?
- How has volunteering contributed to the youth community volunteers' personal development?
- How have youth community volunteers worked together to contribute towards VSO development objectives?
- Are youth community volunteers contributing towards sustainability of VSO development objectives?



Volunteers use artwork to express their understanding of active citizenship

Figure 1- Bagerhat District, South West Bangladesh



2. Context

Youth (defined as 15-36 years-of-age) constitute a third of the total population in Bangladesh. A quarter of young people today are without a primary school education contributing towards high levels of youth unemployment and under employment. Overall health status is improving in Bangladesh but critical primary health problems persist particularly in rural areas. For example, there is widespread childhood malnutrition, one of the highest rates of maternal mortality in the world and extensive incidents of preventable diseases prevail due to a lack of access to and information about sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and sexual reproductive health. Compounding this, there are fewer than three doctors for every 10,000 people, while many community health facilities are under-utilised due to poor service quality and a lack of information about the types of services available. Young people also lack platforms to nurture their leadership qualities and skills to develop as future leaders and volunteers for the development of their own communities¹.

Bagerhat, South West Bangladesh is one of the poorest and more conservative regions in rural Bangladesh where primary health issues prevail. A household survey in three villages showed just over a half (54%) of the community have access to safe drinking water, 17% have access to sanitary latrines, and 49% used soap for washing hands².

In 2012, youth volunteers worked in South West region of Bangladesh in the villages of Chardakatia and Doriumajhori as part of a ICS pilot project implemented through a local partner organisation called Renaissance. Renaissance has been a VSO partner since 2006 and has so far hosted five ICS teams and four long term professional volunteers³. Currently, Renaissance is receiving no volunteer input from VSO Bangladesh but continues to work in 14 Union Parishad under five upazilas (i.e. sub-districts) through programme initiatives addressing community issues including poverty, environmental degradation, social discrimination, violations of human rights and poor governance

From September 2013 to September 2014, three teams of ICS volunteers worked consecutively for three months in Santashpur, Pipradanga, Kitionkhali villages in the Chitalmari Upazilla, Bagerhat district of South West Bangladesh. Altogether, 25 UK volunteers worked alongside 18 national volunteers from Dhaka University for the first month of each cycle and 105 youth community volunteers in total were involved.

¹ VSO Bangladesh funding signature package (2015)

² VSO ICS South West health project debrief report (2013)

VSO programmatic approach

VSO Bangladesh (VSOB) has adopted a rights-based approach which considers that if poverty is to be reduced in Bangladesh, it is necessary that the poor themselves become a stronger voice in society. This is not only through NGOs but also as active volunteers and citizens to influence governments and elites. VSO Bangladesh has been facilitating a process of social and cultural transformation in nine districts across three regions in Bangladesh (NW, SW and Chittagong Hill tracts) to implement projects in 64 'model villages'⁴ focused on engaging three groups of key players:

- The poor and excluded generally women, girls, adivashi, youth and dalit
- Citizens committees, corporate and civil society engaged in fighting poverty
- Government institutions, unions and upazillas (e.g. parish and local council levels of government)

In order to achieve development results through socio-cultural changes VSOB prioritised three themes (e.g. livelihoods, inclusive governance and health) in the country strategic plan (2012-2015). Gender and climate change are considered to be cross cutting themes⁵.

VSO Bangladesh engages youth volunteers, long-term professional volunteers and corporate volunteers to work through local partner organisations to implement the country strategic plan. UK and national youth volunteers worked alongside local youth community volunteers on projects in each of the three priority regions from September 2012 to September 2014 as part of the ICS programme. All ICS projects were designed to contribute towards VSO health development outcomes by working towards the following project health outcomes:

- Increased awareness of community members on primary health care issues including hygiene, use of safe drinking water, nutrition and others
- Inclusion of community youth in health promotion activities
- Increased access to government health services by the community



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⁵VSO Bangladesh Country Strategy (2012-2015) and VSO Bangladesh SCOPE external evaluation report (2013)

3. Methodology

The work was overseen by a steering group including country office representatives, VSO Youth Programmes and Impact and Accountability (I&A) teams. Terms of reference were developed and research tools were designed to collect evidence to answer the key research questions. The work was led by the VSO youth programmes Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Adviser and the field work was carried out together with the VSO I&A team M&E Manager, VSOB ICS Project Coordinator and an ICS returned volunteer as translator. An analytical debrief took place at the end of each day and emerging findings were presented to the VSOB staff team at the end of the fieldwork for validation and testing.

The table below shows the range of methods used to collect primary data and the number of stakeholders involved. Bracketed numbers are the total number of activities carried out with each stakeholder group. In addition, desk research also provides secondary data as evidence for this case study.

Table 1: Data collection methods

| | One to one interviews | Paired interviews | Focus group | Participatory workshop | Survey | Total |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| VSOB staff | 3 (3) | 2 (1) | | | | 5 |
| Partner staff | 3 (3) | | | | | 3 |
| Community volunteers | | 16 (8) | | 13 (1) | 35 | 64 |
| National volunteers | | | 7 (1) | | | 7 |
| UK volunteers | 2 (2) | | | | | 2 |
| Beneficiaries | 4 (4) | | 5 (1) | | | 9 |
| Community stakeholders | 6(6) | | | | | 6 |
| Total | 18 | 18 | 12 | 13 | 35 | 96 |

Limitations of the study

Some element of misunderstanding occurred with a number of the survey questions which has resulted in some of the data being deemed as unreliable. Only data considered reliable from the survey has been extracted and used in this case study. Due to time constraints the study did not include any interviews with government officials working in the local area. It would have been useful to explore their perspective as they may have offered alternative viewpoint.

The case study did not set out to explore VSO Bangladesh’s wider programmatic work in the South West. Further research and evaluation is needed in this area to understand more about how youth volunteering contributes to wider VSO programming, and vice versa, as well as the effectiveness of VSO Bangladesh’s ‘model village’ approach in scaling up programmes. The case study was unable to determine the nature and level of youth club activity pre-VSO input as there was no monitoring system in place to measure this and compare change in capacity before and after ICS and long term professional volunteer input. This comparison would have been useful for further assessing sustainability and impact from VSO inputs and interventions supporting youth clubs from 2010 to 2013.

4. Findings

4.1 Why and how does VSO Bangladesh engage local community youths in volunteering?

Youth engagement is an essential part of VSO's country strategy in Bangladesh. The rationale for engaging local youths as volunteers in their own rural communities is particularly strong as an approach to achieving sustainable, grassroots development. Local youths understand the issues their communities face and can play an ongoing role as active citizens addressing these issues:

"It's all about sustainability. If you want to develop the community, you need to involve community youth in the process. Long term professional volunteers, and ICS youth volunteers leave, but they stay." - Renaissance staff member

More than 6000 youth clubs have been registered with the government in the country. In 2010, VSOB agreed on a partnership with the Ministry of Youth and Sport to work through volunteers and local partner organisations with a view to building the capacity of youth clubs to become formal independent institutions that provide a platform for the promotion of youth community volunteerism and leadership for development. Additionally, VSOB engages youth community volunteers in Chitalmari Upazilla sub-district by supporting youth clubs in five model villages using an assessment process designed and carried out in partnership with VSO's local partner Renaissance.

The aim of the partnership is for neighbouring villages and youth clubs to learn from the model village approach and apply this learning to help develop their own community. In 2012, a long-term professional volunteer Human Resource Adviser worked in the South West region to create a constitution for youth clubs, develop roles and responsibilities for youth clubs members, and promote the inclusivity of youth clubs by formalising the recruitment of local youth community volunteers. The membership criteria for 16-28 year-olds includes the motivation to carry out local community development, and a minimum monthly time commitment to volunteering. Teams of ICS youth volunteers have also worked alongside youth community volunteers in all five model villages. Membership of these youth clubs and number of youth community volunteers has increased significantly in this time, particularly amongst girls.

Figure 2 shows some of the motivations and barriers to volunteering outlined by the community health volunteers.

Figure 2 – Motivations and barriers to volunteering for community youth volunteers



Local youths were motivated to volunteer mainly by their desire to develop their own communities. Volunteering was identified as a way to develop skills for employment and life skills but personal gain was identified as being less important than benefits for the community and nation. Access to knowledge, resources and networks were identified as motivational factors for community youths to volunteer. The opportunity for mentorship from role model ICS volunteers, particularly the national volunteers from Dhaka University, was attractive to local youths. Exposure to new cultures was another motivating factor to volunteer alongside UK youth:

"They think, 'no one can motivate me until I'm interested.' ICS volunteers create that interest." - VSO Bangladesh staff

In addition to local partner Renaissance held recruitment events at local youth clubs before the start of the ICS project to raise awareness of the value of volunteering for development, it was identified that youth community volunteers themselves are most effective at recruitment inspiring their peers:

"I recruited five new members in the last month. It was hard, they didn't want to join at first. But I inspired them by showing them the benefits to themselves and their village." - Youth community volunteer

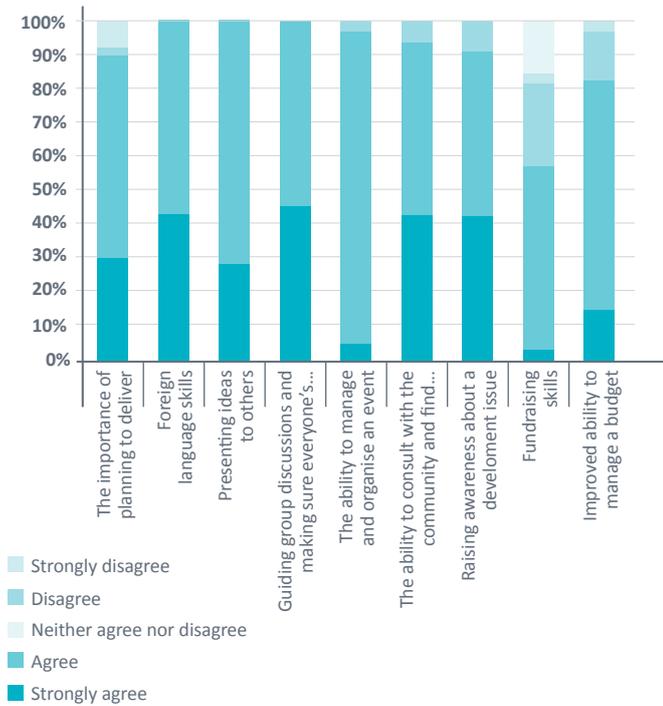
The concept of volunteerism is not widely understood or valued in Bangladesh. Often, international volunteers are perceived as challenging social and cultural norms and a lack of belief in youth as agents of positive change contributes to negative attitudes towards volunteering. However, despite community resistance to volunteerism still persisting, this has reduced since ICS:

"Parents and community members told us not to waste our time volunteering and instead study and earn money... but they changed their minds and supported us after seeing our good work". - Youth community volunteer

4.2 How has volunteering contributed to youth's personal development?

The chart below illustrates the results of a community volunteer survey and shows perceptions of how volunteering has contributed to their personal development:

Chart 1: Results of a community youth volunteer survey based on 35 respondents



The skills gained through volunteering that were most commonly reported by youth community volunteers in interviews include time management skills, English language and IT skills. Skills less commonly reported such as proposal and report writing, conducting meetings, business skills and presentation skills were perceived by some as valuable for gaining employment and improved educational performance. All youth surveyed believe that volunteering contributes towards their development overall, with greater impact on their own personal than professional development:

Chart 2: Volunteer perceptions of impact of volunteering on personal and professional development



Soft skills such as problem solving, networking, interpersonal, communication, relationship building, and research skills for identifying community issues were reported as valuable. One youth community volunteer even reported gaining sufficient technical skills to replicate building a water filter in another village. Nearly half of youth community volunteers surveyed strongly agreed that volunteering alongside ICS volunteers developed their facilitation, negotiation, cultural awareness and team working skills. Knowledge of project planning and organisation, international development, community development and primary health issues were also highlighted as being gained through volunteering experience. Attitudinal change such as increased confidence, discipline, sense of community, friendship, empathy, self belief, empowerment, maturity and open mindedness were associated with volunteering. In addition, changes in behaviours such as increased leadership, socialising, understanding and challenging social norms, demanding rights, improved inter-generational relationships, practicing gender equality and increased flexibility were reported. Many respondents perceived the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours developed through volunteering as invaluable for building youth capacity as leaders and agents for community development:

“If my daughter sees something wrong she now challenges people. She is more social, her English language her improved and she makes us understand the community issues.” - Mother of youth community volunteer

4.3 How did youth community volunteers work with others to contribute towards VSO development objectives?

Team work:

There is evidence to suggest that while youth clubs provide the structure for young people to work together to develop their community, ICS volunteering brought new dynamism to this. Summarised below are three types of youth who bring unique contributions to team-based youth volunteering:

UK volunteer



- Media and publicity skills
- Research skills
- Commitment to volunteerism
- IT and English skills
- Planning and organisation
- Time management
- Promote gender equality
- Fun ways of learning
- Ability to challenge and probe

National volunteer



- Acted as translators & motivators
- Understanding of lang & culture
- Mentors & role models for youth
- Proposals and budgeting
- Building relationships between community and UK youth
- Knowledge of international development
- Research skills

Community volunteer



- Knowing who to speak to in community
- Gathering people for CADs
- Understanding community context
- Motivated to develop own community
- Passionate and enthusiasm
- Building community acceptance of volunteering

The combination of skills, knowledge and experience of each type of youth (e.g. UK, national or community) added value to the team-based volunteering work. Where UK volunteers generally were seen to have brought fresh ideas, motivation and skills, local volunteers understood how to adapt these ideas to the community context and facilitate community involvement.

The national volunteers played an important role in building bridges between the UK and community volunteers. They acted as translators of language and culture while contributing their knowledge of international development from their academic studies in Climate Change and Disaster Management at Dhaka University. Teams did however face challenges with such diverse youth working together including decision making, personality clashes and misunderstandings (e.g. often resulting from language barrier and cultural differences). Yet, with the support from volunteer team leaders and partner staff, these challenges were overcome and the learning from these experiences was gained:

“When youth work collectively in a group and are well coordinated this is very effective. One develops and helps others to develop too bringing lots of benefit to all.”- Citizens Committee member

Building networks to leverage advice, support, knowledge and resources

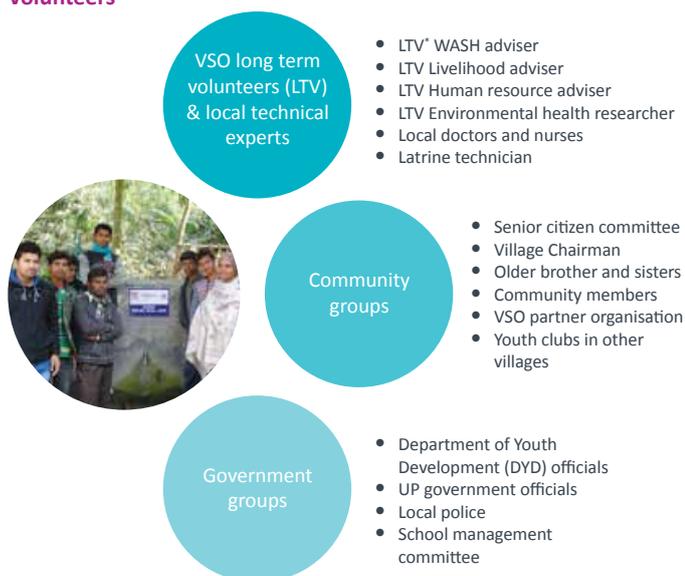
Youth community volunteers worked with ICS volunteers to establish networks with a wide range of stakeholders to leverage advice, support, knowledge and resources for volunteering. Local partner organisations played an important role linking youth volunteers with community stakeholders, particularly government officials. There were examples where youth community volunteers with the support of ICS volunteers taking the initiative to build and develop these networks:

“At first I went to the hospital to talk to the doctors about the health camp. They set up meetings to communicate with the public health department and hire local technicians to build latrines.” - Partner organisation staff

Less favourable qualities were also described such as lack of technical knowledge, over enthusiasm leading to loss of focus on objectives, and being impressionable or easily convinced. Youth community volunteers worked with ICS volunteers to establish a network of advisers and experts who helped to mitigate some of these challenges. The citizens committee (e.g. an established formal group of influential community elders) and the older brothers and sisters (e.g. an informal group of former youth club members) were consulted on all plans for volunteer work. VSO long-term professional volunteers also gave technical advice on project activities and local experts were engaged to provide technical support where needed. For instance, government doctors and nurses were invited to run mobile health camps in each village, and a local latrine technician was hired to guide the volunteers in building 54 latrines. Youth volunteers also consulted with the school management committee when planning awareness raising activities in schools.

The diagram below summarises some of the key groups of people that youth volunteers build networks and relationships with while volunteering:

Figure 3. Network of advisers and supporters built by youth volunteers



There were some examples of youth volunteers leveraging support and resource from local government officials such as applying to the Department for Youth Development to help fund first aid and livelihoods training for youth club members. Applications for funding and official status for youth clubs were also made. ICS volunteers reported that 13 meetings were held over the course of year with local elites, government officials and Union Parishad to gain support for youth volunteering activities. Youth community volunteers emphasised that partner organisations and VSO support in the process was essential for successfully linking youth with the government. This was demonstrated in 2012 when ICS and youth community volunteers successfully lobbied the government to repair a local road after organising a rally and petition to effectively present the issue. The work was instigated by a long-term VSO volunteering Environmental Health Adviser who helped to organise the volunteers and build the case for the campaign. VSOB also organised an event in Dhaka at the end of each ICS cycle to provide the opportunity for the youth community and ICS volunteers to present their work and influence government officials and other NGOs in recognising the value of youth volunteering.

A number of qualities in young people were highlighted as key for enabling youth volunteering work and network building in particular. These were identified as creativity, will power, passion, innovation, energy, enthusiasm, flexibility, and curiosity :

“They are very motivated and busy. They have will power and ask how to do things. They are always questioning.”
- Partner organisation staff

* VSO long term professional volunteer

Community involvement throughout the project cycle

Community members and youth community volunteers were integral to the planning, implementation and evaluation of the ICS project. Each team of ICS volunteers worked with their youth community counterparts to conduct a participatory rural appraisal (PRA) at the start of the three month placement. Participatory action research was carried out using methods such as focus group discussions, community mapping through transect walks, and household surveys of between 150-200 households in each village. Information was used to plan team activities for the next three months, and evaluate activities carried out by the previous team. Detailed handover notes including community contact details were also written by each team to enable the next to build on learning and networks. In addition, youth community volunteers were able to build on and share learning between ICS teams as they remained in the community when ICS volunteers left. Citizen committee members and youth community volunteers were always present at ICS team planning days at the start of each cycle and invited to weekly team meetings. ICS M&E tools helped to focus team planning on achieving long-term project objectives accompanied by detailed action plans of daily activities for youth volunteers in each village to focus on. Youth community volunteers were integral to the planning, implementation and evaluation of all ICS project activities:

“They did everything, they were the project! There were only two UK volunteers and two Dhaka students in each village. The 20 youth club members (youth community volunteers) did it all and made things happen. They were really enthusiastic and hard working and the impact on their own personal development was the most significant thing about the project.” - ICS UK volunteer leader

Wider community engagement was vital to the implementation of ICS project activities and was mainly achieved through community action days (CADs). These are events planned and organised by ICS together with youth community volunteers to raise awareness and knowledge around issues identified by the community while inspiring the community to take action and change behaviours. Within one year, 129 CADs were planned and delivered by youth volunteers on a range of themes. A series of engaging, interactive, accessible activities and learning methods were particularly successful at raising attendance for these events. It was reported that more than 300 people from five VSO model villages and wider villages attended drama events highlighting social issues. Below is a diagram summarising some of the CAD volunteering activities carried out by ICS and youth community volunteers:

Figure 4: Summary of ICS project CAD activities

Community infrastructure development

- Pond cleaning and water filtering
- Waste management and disposal
- Building latrines

Awareness raising

- International youth day (Mental health matters)
- International environment day
- Youth sports tournaments promoting volunteerism
- Dramas exploring social issues (climate change, early child marriage, discrimination)
- Active citizenship days (learning about international and community development issues)
- Blood group and diabetes testing events
- Health promotion events on hand washing, tooth brushing, health and hygiene
- Health camps and mobile health clinics
- Building school gardens raising awareness on climate change and nutrition

Peer education and training

- First aid training in schools
- Traditional birth training
- Youth leadership and volunteerism sessions in schools

Building intergenerational relationships and community cohesion

While building networks and involving the community in all stages of their work, youth volunteers strengthened relationships and built cohesion within the community:

“It feels as if youth are doing something positive for the community. I’m surprised how integrated they are. They don’t think about their own benefit, they only think about the poor people.” - Primary actor from mobile health camp

Youth community volunteers played a crucial role in accessing and sustaining these relationships and networks. Whilst ICS volunteer placement worked in three month cycles, youth community volunteers remained and were able to build on relationships within their villages. Living in host homes enabled ICS volunteers to integrate well into the community and work with youth community volunteers to build informal networks and support for their work. Some resistance towards UK volunteers was felt within the community at first but this reduced overtime as youth community volunteers helped to build trust and understanding between the UK youth volunteers and the community. Reports of emotional farewells were common; signalling the strength of the relationships built within the three months of each ICS placement. Some host homes also reported continued contact with the ICS volunteers by phone and Facebook.

Increased mutual support, trust and respect between young and old helped to create a more enabling environment for youth volunteering.

“Love and affection towards youth in the community has grown... Attitudes towards youth in the community have changed. People see they can contribute a huge amount towards the community development...They are investing their time and have transparency in what they are doing.” - Citizens Committee members

4.4 Are youth community volunteers contributing towards sustainability of VSO development objectives?

VSO health development objectives

At the end of the first year ICS project, community use of latrines had increased by 10%, soap use was up by 31%, and access to safe drinking water had increased by 38% due to the installation of four water filters, repairing of 19 tube wells and the cleaning of three ponds. Five months since the ICS project had finished, there are continued signs of improved health related practices leading to healthier lives:

“Before the water filter was installed I had a gastric problem and had medicine everyday. Now because of the water filter I am completely cured and no longer have to pay for medicine.” - Primary actor

“There is a huge change in daily activities. People now use soap and sandals in latrines. Children come home from school and tell us to wash our hands!” - Primary actor

“Before people in the village had no idea where the community clinic was and how to get information about health. We linked the community with the clinic.” - Community volunteer

Youth community volunteers and other community members reported a continued contribution towards achieving VSO health development objectives in a number of ways:

- Monitoring the use of latrines built during ICS, ensuring soap and sandals are available
- Regularly cleaning water filters and ponds
- Continuing to hold hand washing, health and hygiene campaigns in schools
- Practicing first aid training to respond to emergencies in the community and organised first aid training for new youth club members
- Organising an awareness raising event for World Aids Day



Youth community volunteers at water filter

VSO cross-cutting theme: Gender

Many people reported that girls are now the most active youth community volunteers, and that female membership of youth clubs has dramatically increased since ICS. Reasons given for this include:

- Strong UK volunteer female role models, including a female ICS UK team leader
- Teams of youth volunteers during ICS modelling gender equality through their work
- Attitudinal change amongst parents of female youths allowing their daughters to volunteer.
- Fears around their safety have reduced, leading to girls and boys working together with increased understanding and support confidence for female volunteerism:

“The community has seen lots of female UK volunteers and it makes them think ‘why can’t our girls do it’? They make comparisons.”

- Citizen Committee, Secretary

VSO cross-cutting theme: Climate change

Five months after the ICS project finished, youth community volunteers continue to maintain school gardens and raise awareness of climate change and nutrition:

“The volunteers developed a school garden and the children have learnt about nutrition and also understand the benefits of planting trees and plants and how this will help the environment.”

- Head teacher



School garden

VSO cross-cutting theme: Disability

Youth community volunteers continue to visit two beneficiaries with disabilities regularly to provide support such as constructing latrines with disabled access. Several community volunteers now know how to build these. This knowledge was shared by a local latrine technician who attended World Bank training on the subject organised by VSO.

Factors enabling sustainability of youth community volunteering

There are signs that youth community volunteers are continuing to contribute towards achieving VSO development objectives while building on some of the project outcomes and activities started through ICS. Although the level of youth community volunteering activity seems to have decreased since the ICS project ended in September 2014, there is evidence from a range of stakeholders that the overall level is greater now than before the ICS project began. A more enabling environment for youth community volunteering for development has been established for a number of reasons:

Increased capacity and confidence of youth as volunteers:

The skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviours gained through volunteering has increased the capacity and confidence of young people to continue volunteering work. Young people are increasingly able to identify the benefits from volunteering both for themselves, and to their community. A greater spirit of volunteerism seems to have developed amongst youth club members, motivated by their successes as volunteers so far:

“We can now see how little regular effort each week can bring about change in society.” - Youth community volunteer

“Before ICS local youths didn’t know what they could achieve. Now they have a bigger vision and an idea about how to make plans.”
- Citizens Committee member

Young people are also motivated by an improved social status that seems to have come as community members are also identifying the value of their volunteering work:

“I have a better position on my family now since volunteering.”
- Youth community volunteer

Increased capacity of youth clubs: The collective development in skills, knowledge, attitude and behaviours of youth club members through volunteering has increased the capacity of youth clubs. The governance structures already in place have been reinforced and youth club appointed members (e.g. chair person, vice-chair person, secretary, finance officer) have developed skills working with ICS volunteers:

“Local youths are better volunteers since ICS. They have a platform for discussions they have created themselves. Before ICS they were not organised but now they are united.”
- Partner organisation staff



School management committee, Renaissance and VSO staff

“Local youths are better volunteers since ICS. They have a platform for discussions they have created themselves. Before ICS they were not organised but now they are united.” - Partner organisation staff

Youth clubs continue to have weekly meetings to discuss and plan volunteering activities and have introduced a new system to keep minutes including actions agreed from each meeting, setting agendas, and recording attendance. One youth club has created two new positions (e.g. social organiser and meeting coordinator) since ICS. In December 2014 a social gathering was organised by another youth club to help sustain team working fostered during ICS:

“Everyone has a challenge inside but needs a platform. Volunteering has given us the knowledge of how to establish ourselves in society and our youth group in the community.”
- Youth community volunteer

A youth club also described how they now have monthly membership fees for youth club members generating a small income to support volunteering activities. In Bangladesh, youth club membership has generally increased, particularly amongst girls. There are also signs that older youth club members are recruiting new members and supporting them to develop by training them in some of the skills they have already gained since volunteering:

“They are continuing with small activities. There is no fund but they are trying to raise a small fund. For example if someone is poor and can’t afford books they will try and help them by giving money for a book. They are doing computer training so they can train others.”
- Senior group member

Increased active citizenship: There was a strong sense of active citizenship described by youth community volunteers and younger children. Increasingly, young people are motivated to volunteer to develop themselves, support their own families and wider community members:

“I want to study more to help the community. I want to get a good job so I have money to support the community.”
- Youth community volunteer

Some youth community volunteers also reported an interest in learning about volunteering in other villages and regions of Bangladesh, or even other parts of the world. Active citizenship in a national and global sense appears to have been strengthened as young people have gained greater knowledge of international development issues. Many youth community volunteers are still in contact with the ICS volunteers and some national volunteers report that they still have a mentoring relationship with youth community volunteers in discussing plans and ideas. ICS national volunteers have also become more active and have established a volunteering club in Dhaka University which plans to support street children. They have already collected money to buy warm clothes for street children in the winter for example. Since ICS, youth community volunteers are now well known in the community as a reliable source of support:

“Now with any sort of problem you know you can go to the youth and ask for help. For example, social rituals and emergencies.”
- Primary actor

Youth community volunteers continue to inspire others to join youth clubs and membership is growing. Parents are also reporting that children are returning from schools and sharing learning with them from awareness raising campaigns that youth community volunteers have carried out in schools:

“Many people in the community want to volunteer now and join social development work willingly. We no longer need to push families to do this.” - Partner organisation staff

There are signs of increased active citizenship cascading to other villages too. Youth clubs have opened in two nearby villages and youth community volunteers suggest that this has resulted from young people in these villages being inspired by attending community action days (CADs). New youth clubs are replicating some of the volunteering activities underway in the VSO model villages:

“There is evidence that young people in other villages are now also monitoring and cleaning water filters.” Partner organisation staff

Strengthened community networks and increased social capital:

Many youth community volunteers continue to leverage support, advice, knowledge and resources through the networks they have established through volunteering. They continue to meet regularly with Renaissance, Citizens Committee members and the older Brothers and Sisters Group regularly for advice and support:

“Last month youth community volunteers came to speak with me about how to improve the youth club and continue work for their community, rather than wait for the next ICS.”

- Chairman, Citizens Committee

Inter-generational relationships between young and old in the community have improved. There are signs of greater mutual trust and respect, and of young people having greater influence on decision making at the community level:

“The volunteers really respect older people... Attitudes are changing... Since ICS the young people are more involved in decision making. It used to be the senior people but now the junior people are more involved in decisions.” - Secretary, Citizens Committee

Local partner organisation, Renaissance continues to support youth clubs through the provision of weekly computer classes and assistance in applying for funding to the Department for Youth Development (DYD) in livelihoods training. Some youth community volunteers have already received training on vegetable and strawberry cultivation, and mattress making, providing them with the skills for self employment. Renaissance reported increased organisational capacity to support youth volunteering having gained experience managing an international youth volunteering programme particularly in the areas of financial management, M&E, influencing local government and community engagement:

“The profile of the organization was enriched by working with ICS and professional volunteers... So opportunity of the organisation has been increased to develop network and liaison with both government and other international organisations... Communication

skills of the youth volunteers has developed in terms of IT and English. The youth volunteers are now able to communicate with all relevant stakeholders effectively and efficiently.”

- Renaissance partnership review (2013/14)

Relationships and networks have strengthened in the community on a number of levels as a result of youth volunteering. This includes young people in youth clubs, between youth clubs in different villages, senior citizens committees, local NGOs, and government officials. Although work is still needed to strengthen these relationships further in particular for youth to leverage resources and knowledge (e.g. advice and support) from local government, social capital has increased as a result laying strong foundations for community development. The theoretical link between social capital, relationship building and community development is explained by academic Alison Gilchrist:

“Social capital recognises that the relationships of everyday life between neighbours, colleagues and friends, even casual acquaintances have value for the individual and for society as a whole. Social capital is built through trust between people and social institutions, participation in social and civil activities, and networks of personal contacts.” - Alison Gilchrist, The Well Connected Community (2013)

Factors limiting sustainability of youth community volunteering

The level and focus of youth community volunteering activity has decreased since the ICS project finished in September 2014.

A number of reasons can be identified for this:

Reduction in structure and support for community youth volunteering:

The ICS project provided structure and support for community youth volunteering. Funding was available to ensure full-time local partner organisation staff support for youth clubs in five model villages. In addition, a UK and national volunteer team leader provided full time support and supervision for ICS volunteers and youth community volunteers. The national volunteer team leader is now working for Renaissance and support to the youth clubs is continuing but at a reduced level:

“We want Renaissance to monitor us regularly to see what they are doing. At the moment contact is once every three months and during ICS it was much more frequent, sometimes daily.”

- Youth community volunteer

As M&E tools are no longer in use there is a less formal process and structure for team level and project level planning. Volunteering activities respond to ad hoc community need rather than directed towards monitoring and achieving contribution towards VSO development objectives:

“A one-year project is too short and leaves uncertainty for the youth clubs. They reach level 2 on a 1-5 capacity scale where we want them to reach level 5 and become independent institutions. It leaves the youth clubs with uncertainty. They continue but are scattered and have less structure than they did during the ICS project.”

- VSO Bangladesh staff



Youth club building waiting completion

A small budget was available through the ICS project to carry out CAD activities and without this the ability to continue many volunteering activities started during ICS is diminished. For instance, materials cannot be purchased for building latrines, refreshments for community awareness raising events and resources for workshops (e.g. a laptop provided to youth clubs by VSO is no longer available for use. Some youth clubs started generating their own income through membership fees and some individuals had success receiving livelihoods training through applications to the Department for Youth Development (DYD). Other examples include a youth club who reported that they are not registered and are therefore unable to apply for training grants. Reasons given were that they do not have a permanent youth club structure and meet in a local temple or hired community space. This has contributed towards exclusion of muslim youth from attending youth clubs. As well as a structured volunteering programme, a physical space for youth clubs is seen as integral to visioning future planning and implementing activities.

Competing pressures and priorities for youth: Youth are a transient group and move on from the community to study or work elsewhere. ICS volunteers, youth community volunteers and community members encourage youth to develop and grow:

“Older members support younger members to get into college.”

- Youth club member

As more experienced youth community volunteers move on, some of the institutional knowledge of the youth club is lost. Participants say the intention to leave a legacy and pass on knowledge and expertise is there but a structure for this to happen is not yet in place:

“Its important to get more young people involved as we get busier and have less time as we get older.”

- Youth community volunteer

Youth community volunteers face competing pressures on their time because of needing to study and earn money. A significant number of factors that initially motivated youth community volunteering such as cross cultural learning, team dynamism, access to resources are no longer in place without ICS. Although attitudes towards youth and understanding of the value of volunteering in the community have improved, some of the original challenges from the community persist:

“Trust can be a challenge, people don't understand youth motivations for volunteering... villages have social and religious clashes and these hamper volunteers' work.”

- VSO Bangladesh staff member

Although increased active citizenship and spirit of volunteerism was evident, the ability to sustain the same level of volunteering activities to contribute towards VSO development objectives has been challenging for community youth volunteers.

5. Conclusion

This case study highlights the effectiveness of VSO Bangladesh's approach to engaging local youth as community volunteers through capacity building of youth clubs to provide a platform to promote volunteerism, active citizenship and youth leadership for development. Membership of these youth clubs has increased significantly, particularly amongst girls. Evidence suggests that these youth clubs have become more organised and active than before VSO's intervention but face a number of resource challenges that restrict their potential.

Evidence shows that youth community volunteering enables local youth to gain skills and knowledge relevant for employment and improved educational attainment. Most youth community volunteers believe volunteering contributes more to their personal than professional development. Meanwhile, the skills, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours developed through volunteering build local youth capacity as leaders and agents for community development.

Youth community volunteers have pre-existing knowledge, skills and attributes that contribute to effective team working alongside UK and national youth volunteers. Their understanding of the local context and enthusiasm for local community development helps teams of youth volunteers to effectively engage the community throughout the project cycle during planning, implementation and review stages. Youth community volunteers are instrumental in building networks and relationships in the community to leverage knowledge, resource, support and advice for community development activities. A greater understanding of volunteerism in the community has also led to increased active citizenship. These factors enable community youth volunteers to contribute towards achieving a number of health outcomes including increased access to safe drinking water and hygienic sanitation, and improved WASH health-related practices. A number of unintended outcomes were also achieved such as increased awareness of climate change, nutrition and gender quality.

Five months after the ICS project finished, youth community volunteers are continuing with community development activity but are less active and less structured in their approach. Volunteering

activities are more informal and less focused on contributing towards VSO health development objectives as they were during the ICS project. Despite improved community attitudes towards youth and volunteering, a number of challenges persist and the additional motivations associated with volunteering alongside ICS and VSO professional volunteers have been removed.

To enable sustainable contributions of youth community volunteering towards VSO health development outcomes, longer term support from VSO is needed to build the capacity of youth clubs to become independent institutions. These interventions could help to motivate and sustain continued youth community volunteering and active citizenship. However it is not guaranteed that the energy and enthusiasm of youth community volunteers will be harnessed to contribute towards VSO health development outcomes. Soft outcomes reported throughout this case study such as increased community cohesion, active citizenship and youth empowerment do form valuable foundations for community development, however are not currently recognised by VSO as development outcomes in their own right. More needs to be done to integrate youth programming into wider VSO health programmes to ensure support, structure and focus to enable youth community volunteering a sustainable contribution towards VSO development outcomes.

It was beyond the scope of the case study to identify evidence of wider VSO development programming in South West Bangladesh and therefore opportunities for integration with youth programming. Further research is needed to identify existing opportunities, or suitable new opportunities to ensure the sustainable contribution of youth community volunteering towards VSO Bangladesh development objectives. Further research is also needed to assess the effectiveness of the VSO Bangladesh model village approach.

This case study provides limited anecdotal evidence of benefits from youth community volunteering spreading to nearby villages. However a full evaluation is needed to corroborate this and enable recommendations on the scalability of this approach.



6. Recommendations

- Create new ways to motivate youth community volunteering other than ICS (e.g. VSO small grants, annual volunteer award ceremony, regular monitoring of youth clubs by VSO staff and partners).
- Continue to build inclusivity of youth clubs (e.g. gender, religion) considering meeting times, venues etc. Potential to broaden age range of youth 18-35 years-old to enable greater legacy planning between older and newer youth club members.
- Promote knowledge sharing between youth clubs and regional exchanges (e.g. NW, SW, and CHT regions) and inter-village linking (e.g. mature, with less mature youth clubs). There is a thirst for knowledge about good practice from global VSO youth programmes and this information could be shared by VSO more widely.
- Continue to invest in youth leaders targeting leadership and management training at youth clubs. There is potential to create a leadership development pathway for youth community volunteers. (e.g. chair people of youth clubs to become ICS volunteers, ICS volunteer to become team leaders; and then finally to have internship opportunities for ICS alumni at VSO and other NGOs).
- Create a culture of training to further build the capacity of youth community volunteers and youth clubs (e.g. project planning and implementation, research skills, networking, advocacy and influencing were all highlighted as training needs by young people). Training of Trainer (TOT) training would be valuable in enabling older youth community volunteers to train newer members so that knowledge is not lost as youth leave the community for studies and jobs.
- Continue to promote institutional change at the government level by introducing culture of youth participation in decision making and investment in youth volunteering for development. This could be achieved through placement of a VSO professional long-term volunteer at the local Department for Youth Development, or Ministry of Youth and Sports as well as continuation of national level sharing events.
- Continue with the VSO Bangladesh integrated programming approach to signpost youth club members to livelihoods training and opportunities through VSO programmes and/or other NGOs. Evidence suggests that volunteering builds soft skills but hard skills for employment are in most in demand (e.g. IT skills, English skills). There is overwhelming demand for the ICS entrepreneur project or other opportunities to build economic and social entrepreneurship to facilitate community development.

Monitoring and evaluation

- VSO global results framework currently captures results under health, livelihoods and education sectors. This report highlights some contribution of youth volunteers to VSO health objectives. A significant outcome of VSO's work in SW Bangladesh is related to active citizenship in the wider community which is an outcome for the young people themselves and as a soft development outcome. There is potential to lead towards governance outcomes as youth community volunteers, together with citizens committees increase capacity to link with and influence local government
- Currently, there is no place to reflect this contribution through the VSO PMLT and global M&E reporting system. As a result, VSO Bangladesh is under reporting the outcomes/impact of its work. The recent VSO Participation and Governance Review has suggested that governance may be introduced into the VSO global results framework as a development outcome. If this is the case, there may be an opportunity for VSO Bangladesh to capture these outcomes through an active citizenship related outcome/indicator. This would enable VSO Bangladesh to monitor youth club capacity in the longer term through the PMLT system. In the meantime, VSO Bangladesh needs to ensure active citizenship-related outcomes continue to be measured through evaluations/evidence-based case studies so this significant aspect of VSO Bangladesh work does not go unrecognised.

VSO volunteers change lives every day. We bring inspiration, energy and vital practical skills to help achieve community goals – better healthcare, more valuable education and broader opportunities. Putting people first leads to lasting improvements in people's lives, bringing us closer to our vision of a world without poverty.



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