



**VOLUNTEERING  
TOGETHER:  
Blending knowledge and  
skills for development**

**UGANDA CASE STUDY REPORT**  
**JANUARY 2022**



**This research project is a collaboration between VSO and the Centre for International Development at Northumbria University.**



*VSO is the world's leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers to fight poverty in developing countries. VSO brings people together to share skills, build capabilities and promote international understanding and action. We work with partner organisations at every level of society, from government organisations at a national level to health and education facilities at a local level.*



*The Centre for International Development at Northumbria University, UK, brings together academics, practitioners and students to promote research, consultancy, teaching, training and public engagement on issues of global poverty and inequality, the communities and individuals who experience this, and the policies and practices that seek to address it. The Centre's work on volunteering addresses a range of key themes, including the roles and activities of local and international volunteers from global North and South, volunteer professionalisation, relationships between different types of volunteers and volunteering, and citizenship and activism.*

**This case study report was prepared by the Research Team at Northumbria University.**

***Authors:***

Professor Matt Baillie Smith, Professor Katy Jenkins, Dr Moses Okech, Christine Adong, Gina Mary Angaun, Dr Inge Boudewijn, Dr Bianca Fadel and Dr Phil Gibby.

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## KEY TERMS AND ACRONYMS

**ICS:** [“International Citizen Service”](#). This was an overseas volunteering programme launched by VSO in 2011 and aimed at youth volunteers (18-25 years old). Despite the closure of the programme in 2020, the term ‘ICS’ has since then been used to describe the involvement of national and community youth volunteers in Uganda.

**Primary actors:** individuals and communities that VSO work with and that take part in or benefit from projects and activities. Since they are not seen as passive recipients of aid, but rather active agents at community level, they are not referred to as beneficiaries.

**Projects:** The following projects were part of the Uganda country case study:

- ◆ **DYNAMIC:** “Driving Youth Led Agrobusiness and Micro Enterprises”
- ◆ **YEPP:** “Youth Employment Enhancement Project” supported by Randstad and Citi Foundation
- ◆ **Nefkens:** “Improving the Lives of Mothers and Newborns in Gulu” supported by Nefkens Foundation
- ◆ **A-PLUS:** “All Pupils aligned for Ultimate Success”
- ◆ **VI-GREAT:** “Volunteer Initiative for Girls: Retain, Achieve and Thrive”
- ◆ **V4D Health:** “Volunteering for Development - Maternal and Neonatal Health”

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Blended volunteering is a flagship approach for VSO in the field, differentiating its work from other volunteer-involving organisations. The blended model is seen as providing opportunities for learning and beneficial exchanges among volunteers and between volunteers and primary actors, and through this, enhancing impact. Evidence collected in the study confirms the value that it can bring for VSO's practice outcomes and development impact, as well as revealing the dynamic nature of blended volunteering and the need for adaptive management strategies to maximise its effectiveness.

This study engages with policy and academic debates around how different volunteering modalities contribute to development. It combines analytical insights across projects, practice areas and country case studies to deliver understandings of design, management, context and dynamics between different volunteering modalities through a participatory qualitative methodology. The research identifies trends and patterns across diverse projects, providing knowledge to address the following research questions:

1. *How do different volunteering modalities contribute value to VSO's work with primary actors?*
2. *How might different volunteering modalities be combined to maximise development impact?*
3. *What are the conditions that contribute to maximising the impact of diverse volunteering modalities, both as individuals, and as teams?*

In this report, we explore how and why the 'blend' works in the specific context of Uganda. This is the second of three planned case study reports. It follows on from the first report examining our case study findings from Tanzania (Baillie Smith et al., 2021), and precedes the final case study report focused on Nepal. The key findings and overall learning from the research in the three country case studies is consolidated in a final synthesis report. In our analysis, we identify key challenges/obstacles faced by volunteers, primary actors and other stakeholders in relation to their experiences of blended volunteering, and suggest areas for future consideration by VSO, to ensure blended volunteering can achieve optimal and sustained development impacts. Through this, we also consider critical issues for other volunteer-involving development organisations to reflect on and learn from.

The report is divided into four main sections. In section 2, we provide a short overview of the literature to situate this research in relation to existing research and the wider volunteering and development sector, as well as the research questions. In section 3, we provide a brief summary of the study's overall methodology and participatory approach, alongside an overview of the Ugandan case study sampling and participants. The main sections of the report are found in section 4 in which we present the research findings from Uganda, building on our findings from the work completed in Tanzania, and reported in our earlier case study report. Finally, the conclusion in section 5 synthesises our research findings and reflects on what these might mean for VSO and development practitioners more widely, moving forward.

## 2. LITERATURE SNAPSHOT

This study examines VSO's blended volunteering approach to understand how it can improve development outcomes, and the factors influencing this process. In this section, we provide a snapshot of volunteer literatures to situate this research, identifying existing knowledge gaps in terms of understanding volunteer relationships, particularly in the South, and highlighting the contribution that a critical analysis of blended volunteering can make to scholarship and practice in the sector.

There is recognition across the sector of the challenges of building an integrated theory of volunteering (Hustinx et al., 2010; Wilson & Musick, 1997), therefore analyses and typologies have reflected on the multiple dimensions and forms of voluntary practice (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003). Most of the existing body of evidence, however, has been framed by accounts from/within the global North, posing challenges for analysing volunteerism across contexts. Existing frameworks for analysing volunteering in the context of development frequently privilege the perspective of international volunteers emphasising global citizenship, cultural encounter, personal and professional development as well as development outcomes (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Brown, 2005; Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018; Meneghini, 2016). Despite the potential for equitable and mutually beneficial relationships through North-South long-term volunteering models (Frilund, 2018; Perold et al., 2013), evidence also highlights the risks of top-down approaches and of reproducing power imbalances, especially with regards to short-term volunteering and 'voluntourism' practices (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016; Sin, 2010).

Despite often treating volunteers as "a unidimensional commodity" (Cnaan & Amroffell, 1994, p. 338) research has explored particular distinctions between structures of involvement, scope and kinds of volunteer-involving organisations (see Cnaan et al., 1996; Einolf & Chambré, 2011; Ellis Paine et al., 2010; Sherraden et al., 2006). Recent research on volunteering and development has questioned some of the dominant models and lenses that have been used. This has led to greater emphasis on more inclusive volunteering spaces in the global South being re-conceptualised as a locus of agency, action and learning. Critical studies on volunteer relationships emphasise the risks of unequal North-South encounters. Volunteering thus needs to be explored as "a relational field of discourse and institutionalised practice, and not as a bounded concept" (Shachar et al., 2019, p. 1438). There is increasing awareness in the literature of the importance of acknowledging power dynamics and hierarchies embedded in these spaces (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2011; Griffiths, 2018). These critical volunteering literatures signal the diversity and richness of volunteer experiences from and within the global South and point to the need to unpack the potential of collaborations across different types of volunteer engagement when discussing policy frameworks in the sector.

We emphasise, however, that the current focus on including perspectives from the global South should not be framed within traditional international volunteering approaches that risk perpetuating volunteers and organisations in the South as the 'hosts'. Understanding blended forms of volunteering in the South means questioning paradigms and ensuring that certain forms of volunteering are not prioritised over others, whilst also challenging the "tendency to assume that definitions and norms developed in the global North are universally applicable and relevant" (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015, p. 18). Rather than homogeneous, the community is also a space of dispute, hierarchies and inequalities (see Jenkins, 2009a; Thomas et al., 2018). In this process, we recognise the importance of self-organisation for community resilience (UNV, 2018) and how community volunteering and resilience can be strengthened through models of "supportive solidarity" (Fadel & Chadwick, 2020). Although attention to informal and community-based volunteer efforts has grown in recent years, there remain clear gaps in understanding the relationships between local volunteering and development. VSO has been a pioneer in highlighting the importance of the active involvement of volunteers in research efforts through participatory approaches (Lewis, 2015), and documenting learning that can "strengthen bottom-up programming by building on the role of volunteers as participatory practitioners" (Turner, 2015, p. 89).

Critical literatures also engage with the notion of volunteering economies and the need to understand remuneration more widely in volunteering (Prince & Brown, 2016). However, it is essential to involve volunteers themselves in these debates, in order to identify strategies to prevent inequalities and also engage with debates around the professionalisation of voluntary work, including its gendered and uneven dynamics (Jenkins, 2009b). This calls for a livelihoods and capabilities approach to allow for a more nuanced way of accounting for volunteer remuneration in relation to the range of assets that communities have to build their lives and future (Baillie Smith et al., 2022).

Much of the available literature focuses on particular types of volunteers, their volunteering experience, and the emerging agenda of how volunteering may contribute to achieving development impacts – particularly related to the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda. Relatively little work has explored the relationships between the different types of volunteers, and between volunteers and other actors, as they emerge both within the field and in other areas related to volunteering. Furthermore, little research focuses on development outcomes, particularly in the context of these complex relationships. While some emerging research does explore the importance of unpacking relationships within volunteering, it notably focuses on the relationships between international volunteers and so-called 'host' organisations and communities, with some discussing how these relationships affect development impact (Chen, 2018) while others argue that the creation of these relationships in and of itself may be seen as a development outcome (Schech et al., 2018). This emerging research demonstrates that academics and policy-makers in volunteering spaces are only recently beginning to explore the role and potential of relationships (Burns et al., 2015b), and that the research that does exist in this area is still predominantly focused on international, North-South volunteering. There are continued silences around the working relationships that occur between different types of volunteers 'in the field', as well as their engagement with primary actors in the context of project activities, and the role these relations may play in shaping power dynamics and outcomes within projects.

There is a significant gap in the existing academic and policy literature around capturing and understanding the interactions between different types of volunteers working together, whether by chance or design, and the ways in which these interactions may improve development outcomes. This gap reflects long-standing preoccupations with, and investments in, particular understandings and practices of development which derive from ideas and power rooted in the global North, and with particular kinds of volunteers, whose mobilities and interests have fitted this model (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018). These preoccupations are increasingly out of step with changing volunteering and development practices. VSO projects have long engaged different types of volunteers bringing their own sets of skills, knowledges, perspectives, backgrounds and strengths into their roles and activities. VSO's novel concept of blended volunteering emphasises these relationships, focusing on how combinations of volunteering modalities working together may contribute to a type of volunteering that is 'bigger than the sum of its parts' – and, by extension, how these combinations and interrelationships contribute to enhancing development outputs. Hence, this research interrogates VSO's innovative blended approach in order to understand the opportunities and challenges of bringing together different volunteering modalities across a range of global South contexts and practice areas, by addressing the following questions:

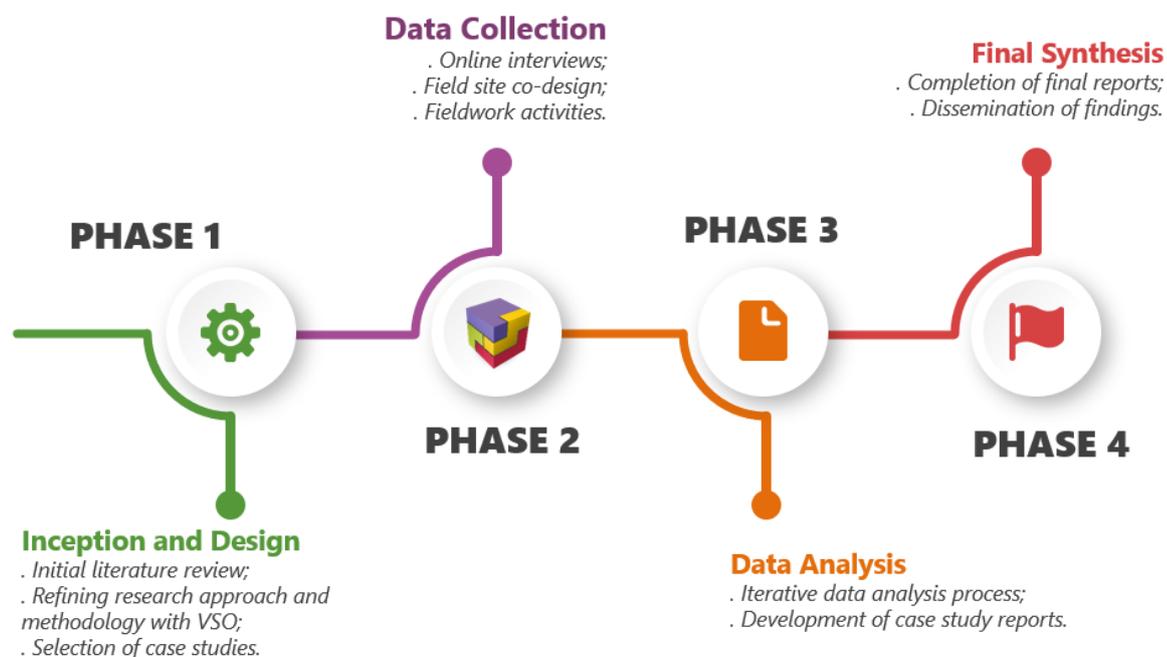
1. *How do different volunteering modalities contribute value to VSO's work with primary actors?*
2. *How might different volunteering modalities be combined to maximise development impact?*
3. *What are the conditions that contribute to maximising the impact of diverse volunteering modalities, both as individuals, and as teams?*

Answering these questions provides new insight and knowledge about the complex realities of volunteering and development. It also provides evidence to support innovative programming for blended volunteering in different settings and oriented to different development ambitions.

### 3. PROJECT OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

This participatory and qualitative research project is a collaboration between VSO and Northumbria University working in partnership to define research methods, population of study and research priorities. The project has been co-designed in four main phases (**Figure 1**):

**Figure 1: Overview of the research process**



**Source:** Northumbria University research team

Phase one included an extensive literature review, discussions with key VSO stakeholders and the selection of the case study countries Tanzania, Uganda and Nepal (replacing the originally selected case study in Myanmar which had to be dropped due to the ongoing political situation in the country). This case study report focuses on activities carried out in Uganda during the data collection undertaken in phase two. The production of this report concludes phase three for the Uganda case study specifically. While the research is a collaboration between VSO and Northumbria University, data collection and analysis has been independently conducted by the Northumbria University team, to ensure objectivity of the data and research outputs. This data was collected by consulting key informants in the following categories:

- ♦ Current and former volunteers who have worked in the selected VSO projects, balancing representation of volunteering modalities (e.g. community, national and international volunteers).<sup>1</sup>
- ♦ Primary actors who have collaborated with or witnessed the activities of volunteers in selected VSO projects. Primary actors are the people and communities that VSO work with. They are the ones engaging in projects, helping VSO understand the community's needs, and working with volunteers (e.g., teachers, parents, hospital workers, etc.).

<sup>1</sup> Here, we highlight place-based volunteering modalities: community volunteers are engaged in VSO volunteering in the same community where they come from; national volunteers are engaged in VSO volunteering in their own country but in a different community from their own; and international volunteers are engaged in VSO volunteering in a different country to their own, either in person or remotely.

- ◆ Local partners who have collaborated with or witnessed the activities of volunteers in the selected VSO projects. Local partners guide support from VSO to be most effective at community level, collaborating in project planning, design and implementation (e.g., government institutions, community-based organisations, NGOs, etc.).
- ◆ In-country VSO staff who have worked in the selected VSO projects, with experience in design and implementation of projects, and who are the focal points for liaison with volunteers.

The following qualitative methods were used for data collection in the field:

- ◆ **Semi-structured one-to-one interviews** tailored to volunteers, primary actors, local partners, and staff members to ensure in-depth exploration of the research questions. This means they have covered various areas of stakeholder experience, such as the roles and activities of participants in the projects, how they have experienced the blended approach of different volunteers working together, challenges that were perceived and areas for future attention in the work of VSO.
- ◆ **Group workshops** involving volunteers and/or primary actors. Some were conducted in mixed groups, and some with primary actors or volunteers only, to account for a diverse range of voices and address potential sensitivities and power dynamics. The workshops were of a participatory nature, exploring with participants shared and relational understandings of volunteering modalities and their impacts, and mapping the interrelationship of activities, roles and impacts of the blended approach in practice. The core elements of these workshops were:
  - **Mapping activities:** participants were asked to work in small groups, to discuss and draw maps of sites and places important to the projects they were involved in, highlighting volunteering activities happening in the field and situating the blend locally. This exercise helped get conversations on blended volunteering started as well as shedding light on power relationships within the room, allowing the researcher to identify how to manage these accordingly (see **Box A** in section 4.2.1).
  - **Focus group discussions:** participants took part in a group discussion on a range of questions and topics related to blended volunteering and their experiences. The researcher ensured all participants were able to contribute their points of view.
  - **Scenario building:** participants worked in small groups to create their 'ideal VSO project'. This helped shed light on the aspects of blended volunteering that participants were happy with, and what challenges they had identified in their experience with VSO that they would approach differently going forward (see **Box B** in section 4.3.1).

### 3.1 VSO Uganda Case Study

Projects and locations for the fieldwork were selected in consultation with VSO, based on the following criteria and considerations: prioritising districts where more than one project is/has been implemented by VSO, allowing for greater diversity of volunteer involvement; prioritising districts where projects are ongoing; possibility of comparing projects between districts; urban and rural balance; and aiming for a balance between VSO core practice areas: including health, education and livelihoods projects.

Our sampling strategy was thereby designed to capture a diversity of modalities and geographies across the Uganda case study. Based on these considerations, the following regions, districts and projects were identified for data collection:

- ♦ *Acholi region:*
  - Gulu district: concluded livelihoods project '**Driving Youth Led Agrobusiness and Micro Enterprises**' (**DYNAMIC**); concluded livelihoods project '**Youth Employment Enhancement Project**' (**YEEP**); concluded health project **Improving the Lives of Mothers and Newborns in Gulu (Nefkens)**.
- ♦ *Karamoja region:*
  - Moroto district: ongoing education project '**All Pupils aligned for Ultimate Success**' (**A-PLUS**); concluded education project '**Volunteer Initiative For Girls: Retain, Achieve and Thrive**' (**VI-GREAT**); ongoing health project '**V4D Maternal and Neonatal Health (V4D Health)**';
  - Napak district: ongoing education project '**All Pupils aligned for Ultimate Success**' (**A-PLUS**); ongoing health project '**V4D Maternal and Neonatal Health (V4D Health)**'.

Data collection activities consisted of face-to-face fieldwork in the above listed regions, conducted in October and November 2021, as well as remote interviews. **Tables 1 and 2** below show the stakeholder categories and total number of participants involved in interviews and workshops, and the volunteering modalities sampled on the projects, respectively<sup>2</sup>:

**Table 1: Interview and workshop participants**

Interview Participants	Volunteers	Primary Actors	Partners	Staff	TOTAL
24 face-to-face and 8 remote interviews	18	5	4	5	<b>32 interview participants</b>
Workshop Participants	Volunteers	Primary Actors			TOTAL
8 group workshops in total (4 volunteers only, 2 primary actors only and 2 mixed)	29	15			<b>44 workshop participants</b>

**Source:** Northumbria University research team

**Table 2: Volunteering modalities explored per selected project**

VSO Uganda Project	Volunteering modalities
<b>DYNAMIC</b>	Community, International
<b>YEEP</b>	Community, National, International
<b>Nefkens</b>	Community
<b>A-PLUS</b>	Community, National, International
<b>VI-GREAT</b>	National, International
<b>V4D Health</b>	Community, National

**Source:** Northumbria University research team

<sup>2</sup> Most of the volunteer workshop participants and volunteer interviewees had worked with other volunteers included in the sample at some point of their involvement on VSO projects. The modalities sampled reflect the realities of fieldwork during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the modalities that were accessible to the research team in this context, either in the field sites or via remote interviews.

## 4. LEARNING FROM THE UGANDA CASE STUDY

In this section, we build upon our learning from the first case study in Tanzania, analysing data from Uganda to add further depth and generalisability to our answers to the three core questions for the research project. Overall, the data from Uganda confirms and supports the key findings from our initial case study in Tanzania, emphasising that the blend of skills and overarching teamwork across different types of volunteer are essential to VSO's project outcomes and development impacts, and a clear strength of the blended volunteering model, as recognised by VSO staff, volunteers and primary actors working across districts and projects in Uganda:

*"Now the blending, of course, it will mean that we have a pool of knowledge and resources, again because at the end of the day we have, we are coming from different backgrounds, different levels of trainings and different skillsets. So basically when you bring people of different skills together, they will improve on efficiency of implementing projects. They bring innovations in terms of project management, in terms of handling problems and challenges that are in programming." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 5)*

*"Working with other volunteers is something good because we share ideas, knowledge and we scheme lesson plans. They are friendly and knowledgeable and are helpful to these learners. They motivate each other like appreciating each other, support and guide each other, we share structural materials, and we have to work together as a team." (Interview, Community volunteer 2, A-PLUS, Napak district)*

*"I remember there is a guy called [Name], he is somebody from Europe. Yes, so he was also a volunteer, he was helping us so much. Then there was also the peer educators that were also supporting the programme really in financial literacy, life skills and some of them were even training on the literacy. Those are the things they were doing, actually to me I think those are the main areas that maybe they were employed to do in terms of their roles but they were doing beyond their roles." (Interview, Primary actor, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"I think the wider the variety of volunteers; say nationals, internationals was a value addition to the project because it would bring in a lot of other experiences shared by the various types of volunteers. So, I think that kind of mix should be encouraged..." (Interview, Partner, V4D Health, Napak district)*

*"I think you have to do it [volunteering] together, because if you are doing it together you achieve more than when you're doing it alone. That's the most important and that maybe people from different cultures, different countries, different perspectives, you can just be open for it, that's really important, and you can achieve more." (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEEP and DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

Whilst our analysis of data from Uganda strengthens many of the key findings from Tanzania, the Uganda case study has also provided new evidence in relation to each of the three research questions, enabling us to enrich our analysis and understanding of how blended volunteering works and to build on and further develop the learning from Tanzania. Where the core messages that emerged from the analysis in Tanzania remained relevant, we have kept them for this report, highlighting how such findings are now strengthened with evidence from a contrasting context. In other places we have adapted the core messages on the basis of the Uganda data, as well as developing new core messages to reflect key themes that are particularly prominent in relation to the Uganda case study. For each research question and in each section, we identify the three core messages that emerge from the dataset, going on to present the evidence and analysis behind these core themes, and conclude with a set of questions for future learning and practice.

## 4.1 Unpacking volunteering modalities

### RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do different volunteering modalities contribute value to VSO's work with primary actors?

Through our analysis of the data from Uganda, and building on learning from the Tanzania case study, we identify three key issues related to this research question:

- ◆ **The blend of modalities and skills for development.** In Tanzania, we identified that contributions were dynamic, thereby complicating easy distinctions between modalities. The same was found in Uganda, although in this case stakeholders take a roles-based approach to characterising the blend and identifying 'what works'; the skills and knowledge that national volunteers bring are particularly identified as crucial to project success.
- ◆ **The contrast between perceptions and practice.** The blended volunteering model assumes the combining of discrete modalities (international, national and community volunteers). As in Tanzania, these geographic distinctions are less well established in practice. We identify particular overlaps between national and community volunteers, and community volunteers and primary actors in the blended model in Uganda.
- ◆ **Capacity to adapt to changing circumstances.** Covid-19 has shed light on VSO's adaptability through blended volunteering, with findings from Uganda reaffirming how the fluid nature of the blend of volunteers and stakeholders enables projects to be more resilient in the face of uncertainty and change.

Below, we explore our findings from the Uganda case study on each of these issues in more detail, deepening elements of the initial analysis from Tanzania, and strengthening our evidence around how the blended volunteering model works. In particular, data from Uganda foregrounds a roles-based approach to conceptualising the blend, whilst also emphasising the pivotal contribution of national volunteers. As in Tanzania, the data from Uganda complicates assumptions of easy distinctions between different elements of the blend, identifying overlaps and fluidity across different categories and recognising these as a particular strength for enabling the blended volunteering model to respond to crisis and uncertainty.

#### 4.1.1 The blend of modalities and skills for development

*In Tanzania, we identified that contributions were dynamic, thereby complicating easy distinctions between modalities. The same was found in Uganda, although in this case stakeholders take a roles-based approach to characterising the blend and identifying 'what works'; the skills and knowledge that national volunteers bring are particularly identified as crucial to project success.*

Data from Uganda demonstrates that blended volunteering was understood and operationalised in a variety of overlapping ways by different stakeholders. In discussing project design and implementation, stakeholders in Uganda emphasise the distinct professional expertise/roles that are required within the blended model, rather than foregrounding skillsets and aptitudes per se.

*"Someone, a volunteer from the Netherlands would offer a skill on this project, but we also need a volunteer from Uganda, you know? A midwife from Uganda or, they're called an ob-gyn [obstetrician], maybe from the Netherlands under a project. Like for example, we had the Nefkens project whereby we had an obstetrician from the Netherlands, another guy from England and then probably we have a midwife from Uganda or a nurse from Uganda working under that project here, in a hospital, under like a partner." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 4)*

Although the blended programming model is premised on geographic distinctions (international, national, community), our data shows that these do not necessarily provide the most relevant lens when it comes to designing projects, where respondents prioritise a blend of skills and expertise rather than modalities, and the emphasis is on filling particular 'gaps':

*"Whenever you're planning for a programme that affects the people, for instance in a specific community, I think to me it's better to start the design with the national volunteer, better than an international person. Let the national volunteer be at the start rather than starting with [the] international volunteer. The national volunteer of course has the context, has the experience of the real challenges that are faced by the community, has actually been also doing some work, maybe with some communities. I think to me it's better to start with the national volunteer, than actually the international volunteer. Now, when we go on the programme, we can find the real strong expertise needs, then we'll bring [an] international volunteer to fill up the gaps. I think that works better like that."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)

There was also a strong recognition in Uganda of skills being distributed across the volunteering modalities, and of the skilled nature of volunteers being a strength of VSO's approach:

*"VSO is a focused organisation who sources people who are experienced, who have knowledge, who have experiences, who can give advice, who can make corrections, they aide in planning, coordinating, networking..."* (Interview, Partner, A-PLUS, Moroto district)

*"And also we looked at the differences between community volunteers, national volunteers and international volunteers. Community volunteers means these are locally recruited skilled trainers from [the] community while national volunteers are skilled trainers within the country, for example they might be in different districts [...] Also international volunteers mean these are professional trainers from other countries might be from Kenya, USA, UK, Tanzania and all those."* (Workshop with primary actors, DYNAMIC, Nefkens & YEOP, Gulu district)

*"...we had one international volunteer from [country]. She was very strong in animal production and veterinary services. And then we had a national volunteer who is very strong in what? In agrobusiness. So, this lady was very strong in the science of animal production, would go to a partner and really speak so much about how to raise a pig, how to feed a pig, but none of the business aspect. [...] So when the international person brought in the scientific way of managing pigs and birds, and what-not, the national person came in with the business aspect of this item. [...] So we saw a very strong transition between the technical input of veterinary services, combining in with the business aspect of a national volunteer, leading to youth earning income."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)

It was notable across the Uganda dataset that stakeholders did not attribute skills to particular geographic modalities as often as in Tanzania. However, when we map the data that we *do* have on the particular skills that stakeholders attribute to different modalities (see **Table 3** below), we can see national volunteers play a pivotal bridging role in the blend, working across and between international and community volunteering modalities:

*"I think it was really important to have the combination between the national volunteer and the international volunteer also to make the bridge within those two. That was really important because if I had to, uhm, also language was important because not all the youth were speaking English, so also for the languages it is important, but also just to make the bridge between understanding the two worlds and just to connect them."* (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEOP and DYNAMIC, Gulu district)

*"I: Do you think you would have been able to carry out this project with only one type of volunteers?  
R: Yes, I would say yes; nationals can work alone but if it is the only internationals, internationals cannot work alone especially at the community level [...] if it is only the nationals, they can do it since this project is cross cutting both facility and community, the nationals can handle both but the internationals would need support of someone who knows the culture, a person who knows the region very well; knows the culture, knows the language; so that is the kind of support they would need; that's why the internationals cannot manage to work alone. When they are to work, they need the nationals to work with. But the nationals can work alone; they can implement it alone."* (Interview, National volunteer, Nefkens & V4D Health, Moroto and Napak districts)

As national volunteers share particular skills with international volunteers, whilst also having others in common with community volunteers, they make a versatile contribution to the blended volunteering model, and this is captured in the diagram below.

**Table 3. Staff, partner and primary actor perceptions of volunteering modalities and skills for development**

COMMUNITY	NATIONAL	INTERNATIONAL
Peer support	Supporting	
Counselling and advising	Coaching and mentoring	
Contextual & cultural knowledge		Knowledge/best practice from other country contexts
Service delivery	Coordinating & Implementing Activities	
Community Outreach		
Training		Training the trainers
	Technical & professional skills and expertise	
Local language skills/communication		
	Monitoring & Evaluating	
	Managerial skills	
	Supervising	

Source: Northumbria University research team

This crucial role played by national volunteers in Uganda is also important in relation to two of the findings we discuss in the next section – the blurriness evident in respondents’ characterisations of the categories of national and community volunteers, and the ways in which the flexibility of national level volunteers within the blend enables projects to respond agilely to unexpected changes and uncertainties according to their different roles assumed in the blend.

#### 4.1.2 The contrast between perceptions and practice

*The blended volunteering model assumes the combining of discrete modalities (international, national and community volunteers). As in Tanzania, these geographic distinctions are less well established in practice. We identify particular overlaps between national and community volunteers, and community volunteers and primary actors in the blended model in Uganda.*

Although from a project design point of view VSO staff clearly distinguish between the different modalities, in our fieldwork in Uganda we found that interviewees, notably VSO partners, primary actors and volunteers themselves, often did not have a strong awareness of the various modalities involved in implementing a development project; the categories of international, national and community level volunteer were not as widely used or recognised as we found in Tanzania:

*“R: My name is ..., I work with VSO as a community health volunteer attached to V4D projects in Moroto and Napak districts.*

*I: Community or National...?*

*R: A national community health volunteer. I am a national volunteer under community health.” (Interview, National volunteer, Nefkens & V4D Health, Moroto and Napak districts)*

*“I didn't get any difficulty working with them, yeah, except actually it took me time also to know that this is [an] international volunteer, this is [a] local volunteer because they used to handle each other and how they used to handle me, [it] took me time but most of the time when they are going, that's when I learned that, you see, this was [an] international volunteer, this one was local, yes.” (Interview, VSO Partner, Nefkens, Gulu district)*

*I: Did VSO explain to you the different types of volunteers?*

*R: We did not get that opportunity to know about those. I think they had a tight programme so we were not told all those various types of volunteers that do exist, we did not get that opportunity, this one I'm talking about I am also [saying] because the other lady comes from another country so I could say that now, that is an international volunteer, it is just by instinct that I learned about that... maybe she's an international volunteer but getting time to talk about it, that these are the categories of volunteers that we have – local or youth or political or international, we did not have that opportunity..." (Interview, Community Volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

As can be seen in the quotes above, the types of roles and responsibilities assumed by volunteers in Uganda did not necessarily match established place-based categories. In the Tanzania case study, we emphasised that the blend should be understood as dynamic and shifting, complicating easy distinctions between the different types of volunteer that make up the blend. In this regard, the data from Uganda suggests that a reduced focus on geography could be an important part of how the blend is conceptualised and operationalised by volunteers and project stakeholders. Many interviewees talked about particular individuals, people with particular professional roles, and particular roles within the project, rather than being able to distinguish between international, national and community volunteers.

*I: Do you know which type of volunteer exactly and what they do?*

*R: Yes, some of them I know what they are doing, some of them were teachers, some of them were farmers, some of them were accountants and some of them we are business people – business men and women. I think that is basically it. I remember there are some international volunteers who came but I was not able to meet them." (Interview, Community volunteer 1, YEOP, Gulu district)*

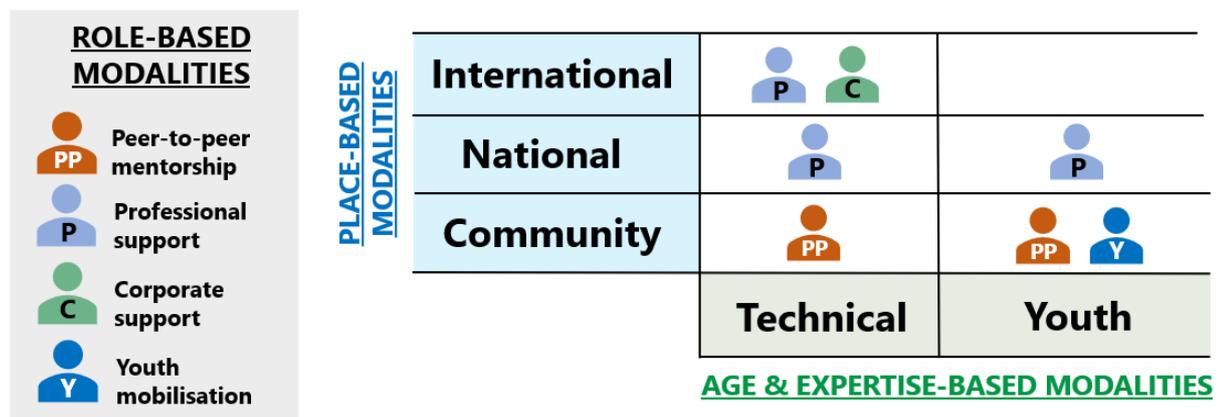
*"Because at VSO I know of the national and international volunteers and I have worked with them. To begin with ICS, I don't think our responsibilities were disaggregated according to whether you're from UK or in-country volunteer." (Interview, National & ICS volunteer, VI-GREAT, Moroto district)*

*I: Do you know the different volunteers that you were working with?*

*R: I know them, some of them for example there is [Name]. That one was brought by VSO then of course there are some community, some youth that have been employed, given the contract to train people, like peer educators in the villages, so there is one called [Name], there is [Name], so they are so many." (Interview, Primary actor, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

These observations have led us to develop **Figure 2**, capturing the ways in which data from Uganda lead to three main ways of understanding VSO volunteering modalities, differing from the Tanzanian analysis particularly when it comes to the role-based emphasis in the blend of modalities, which means that it is primarily focused on the types of activities expected from/performed by each modality, rather than their geographical provenance (international, national and community):

**Figure 2: Matrix of volunteering modalities observed in VSO Uganda**



Source: Northumbria University research team

Whilst our research in Tanzania found that there were clear distinctions between **'Place-based modalities'**, determined by volunteers' geographies, and that volunteers 'knew' which category they fitted in, these distinctions are less straightforward in Uganda where geography was not perceived as *the* key defining feature of volunteering, as discussed earlier. This data underlines the ways in which people's experiences of volunteering within the blended model cut across geographic modalities that are foregrounded in project design. It addresses a recognised gap in research in this area, which tends to focus on institutional and project languages, rather than on the ways different forms of volunteering are experienced in practice amongst, particularly, global South volunteers. We also identify a higher level of fluidity across the categories of national and community volunteers in Uganda – as well as between community volunteers and primary actors, which will be discussed later in this section. The fluidity across volunteer categories suggests that understandings attached to the modalities are less rigid, in relation to locating Ugandan volunteers in the blend. For example, the research team noted that in their discussions with VSO staff, primary actors and partners, community volunteers were often subsumed into the broader category of national volunteers, with the term being used to refer to all Ugandan volunteers regardless of their geographical provenance. This can be seen in the below quotes where the term 'national volunteer' is associated with traits more usually linked with the experience of 'community volunteers':

*"Initially, of course, the international volunteers were very strong, but something was missing. Something was missing actually. But when we brought in the national volunteers they will speak actually for young people on ground, but speak for the partners on ground, to speak for where youth can access inputs, where the markets are very easily and very freely... because they've been in the system, they've been in Uganda, they've been... So we think that yes. Without bringing the national volunteers something would have missed, somewhere in this programme. But we brought them together, mixed them together, that way it's stronger."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)

*"If we didn't have the national volunteer you don't know how this community works and also you don't know which one is an important person and how you can address them, is it more formal, informal? What can you ask? Am I too direct? So that was in terms of the language, but also in how you approach each other and how you work together. It is really important that you have the national person who can give you this cultural information, and I think also at a higher level, like the mayor was also involved and she was like really someone who was supporting the project but she was like higher level. But if you go a little bit down more in the community, these people are maybe a bit suspicious, so then it's really important that you have someone from there to have the connection."* (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEEP and DYNAMIC, Gulu district)

Hence, the most stable categories in Uganda are conceptualised in **Figure 2** as the **'Role-based modalities'**, highlighting an approach focused primarily on the types of volunteer activities attached to each modality, rather than their geographies. Notably, the terms 'peer educators' and 'peer mentors' were often used to refer to community volunteers in Uganda, terms we did not come across in Tanzania. Similarly, corporate volunteers, who are predominantly involved in livelihoods programmes in Uganda, tend to be characterised in relation to the particular specialist skills that they bring to bear on a project rather than primarily understood as 'international' volunteers:

*"Corporate volunteers basically came in to enhance the internal capacity of the partners that we're working with, with VSO. VSO is subcontracting to other smaller organisations. So in terms of the HR, financial resource teams, the data controls, the governance. They're very strong in terms of those areas."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)

This role-based understanding, which was particularly notable in relation to community volunteers, is reflected in the ways in which volunteers speak about themselves and are spoken about by others, across projects and locations:

*"My role as a peer educator, one was, my major role, giving health talks to them, we mobilise them, we put them in a group, we give them a health talk on HIV, as I was saying HIV, Syphilis, early marriage, so now where necessary as my major role, I give referrals to them where necessary to [Name] Health Centre."* (Interview, Community volunteer, Nefkens, Gulu district)

*"I've been working basically as a peer mentor, a peer educator, mentoring the youth that were enrolled for the projects, different training projects." (Interview, Community volunteer 2, YEPP, Gulu district)*

*"So for me I was at the community level; I was working with my colleagues who were based at the health facility; we had a neonatal specialist, we had a midwife specialist who was also a midwife tutor; that was [Name] and the neonatal one was called [Name]; and then we had a gynecologist [Name]. Those were all international volunteers." (Interview, National volunteer, Nefkens & V4D Health, Moroto and Napak districts)*

*"...that part of peer educator, the people who really actively involve the community in the training." (Interview, Primary actor, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"...some of them were at a corporate level, people who have worked in both public and private sector, people who are very skilled with a lot of expertise in the focus areas." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 5)*

This shift in emphasis, particularly perceived at the community level, also suggests that the lens of being a 'volunteer' might be less salient for some participants in Uganda, with volunteer identities overlapping with expectations/experiences of 'work' for which they receive remuneration. This is further complicated by the fact that some community and national volunteers can potentially transition from their volunteer roles into salaried staff positions within VSO, as we saw in the Tanzania case study. The particular dynamics of volunteering in relation to paid work, and the broader debates that it reflects in the literature are discussed in more detail in section 4.2.3. Finally, **Figure 2** also presents '**age and expertise-based modalities**', which, similarly to the Tanzania case study, illustrate how 'youth' and 'technical' were identified as distinct ways of understanding the modalities and the types of expertise articulating with specific roles assumed by volunteers in the blend.

As mentioned earlier, we also identify some fluidity not only *between* volunteering modalities but also across the categories of community volunteer and primary actor, and it was not always clear where the boundaries lay between volunteering for a project or benefiting from/coordinating with it:

*"Some of them were volunteers like one of the Vocation Training Institute, uh, they hired, they would hire youth who have already been trained there and instead of give them payment, they would, yeah, just tell them you are, yes, a volunteer and you get, you get a kind of allowance, stipend. So especially the instructors they were there, you see, after someone has been trained for, let's say, five months and still youth and he has the interest, or she has the interest, so they will be absorbed there as volunteers, of course with a stipend, and to also to ... later on, they are taken for further training." (Interview, International South-South volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"...then we have now the community volunteers who are basically running the project at the grassroots. These can be volunteer teachers who are now taking, the senior women teachers who are giving out, the club patrons, the head teachers; all those even school management committees who are involved in the meetings and also giving guidance and counselling services to the youth." (Interview, Partner, A-PLUS, Moroto district)*

*"We would all learn from each other the things they knew that we didn't know, the things that we also knew that they didn't know. So there was no such thing as superiors, we would always work together to achieve for the purpose of the project." (Interview, Primary Actor, V4D Health, Napak district)*

However, we emphasise that this is not a disadvantage, and in section 4.3.3 we go on to explore the ways in which this approach contributes to the resilience of projects and their embeddedness in the community. Overall, these quotes exemplify the fluidity between the volunteering modalities in Uganda, and the value of a role-based understanding of volunteering, as well as providing an insight into the processes of professionalisation and the volunteering 'journey' that are also at work here. This shows how volunteering, and its blending, is entangled with volunteers' biographies, as these develop in relation to the experience of other volunteers and primary actors they work with. These findings provide further evidence of the importance of taking an expansive approach to understanding volunteering and to conceptualising the blend in the broadest sense, as previously discussed in relation to Tanzania.

In the Tanzania case study, we also explored the impacts of hierarchies across volunteering modalities and, in particular, identified a tension inherent in the blended volunteering model – its design is premised on distinct modalities being combined, but foregrounding these distinctions can also lead to perceived and actual hierarchies between different modalities. The Uganda case study highlights how the 'blend' goes beyond the volunteer categories per se, with a stronger focus on the skills and particular roles of volunteers – suggesting the need to pay attention to the degree to which the blend works as a programming language, but could inadvertently heighten some distinctions if not framed and represented carefully.

As we explore in detail above, our data suggests that the blend is characterised in Uganda by a degree of fluidity across categories, with volunteer 'type' being less important overall. However, this does not reduce the significance of the blended approach but rather, signals a need to understand how it lands in particular contexts in differentiated ways. For example, in settings where the presence of international volunteers or other types of volunteers is less common, or fits within particular histories of development intervention, including interventions by international actors, geography may have greater significance than in other settings. This will then impact how the blend is understood and experienced on the ground. In particular, a softening of some of the boundaries and hierarchies evident in the Tanzania data is apparent in discussions with participants in Uganda, and we hypothesise that this is linked to the emphasis on roles discussed above:

*"We were all doing the same thing. We were teaching and educating these vulnerable people in the community." (Interview, Community volunteer 3, YEOP, Gulu district)*

*"We work just as volunteers; though not specified that this is how a national volunteer should work, this is how an international volunteer should work but we work as volunteers on the same project." (Interview, National volunteer, A-PLUS, Moroto district)*

Although there may be scope for gaps to emerge and/or for duplication of activities to occur when modalities are less clearly defined (see section 4.2.2), this less stratified and predominantly role-based approach can be identified as a strength of the blend as operationalised in Uganda. This is also a key asset allowing for the adaptability of the blend in contexts of uncertainty, as we will discuss in the next section.

### **4.1.3 Capacity to adapt to changing circumstances**

*Covid-19 has shed light on VSO's adaptability through blended volunteering, with findings from Uganda reaffirming how with the fluid nature of the blend of volunteers and stakeholders enables projects to be more resilient in the face of uncertainty and change.*

Our research in Uganda highlights a strength of the blended volunteering as enabling volunteering for development organisations to be responsive and flexible in times of crisis, change and uncertainty, meaning that VSO can adapt the mix of volunteers to suit particular circumstances. This adds analytical weight to the Tanzania findings. The adaptability we identified also operates from the bottom-up, and is evident in comments from volunteers about the flexible ways in which they worked together with other types of volunteer:

*"I suppose across different projects, you know, there would be times where we were may be in VI-GREAT where we were working with health centres, so we were also collaborating with the volunteers on V4D Health in order to do that. And supposedly, in particular here in Karamoja and in Moroto, there is a very close relationship between the volunteers; so, you also feel like you can ask somebody for support or even just in local knowledge that they can help you out with as well." (Interview, International professional volunteer, A-PLUS and VI-GREAT, Moroto and Napak Districts)*

*"...there are situations you cannot do your exact role. What I'm trying to say is there are times when other different volunteers whose roles were different could come in to do specific tasks which were not meant for them, so we would work just like that." (Interview, Community volunteer 2, YEPP, Gulu district)*

We also found instances where volunteers worked across different projects, using their initiative to enable a flexible approach in order to maximise their contribution and to overcome local level challenges.

*"The project I was working on was YEPP, Youth Employment Enhancement Project, but the project was not moving on so quickly as we would like to, that's why I had some extra time, and that's why I was also involved in another project which was DYNAMIC. [...] And then I was doing some things for the project of YEPP and in the DYNAMIC project they could use some help, so then I joined them also in some specific subjects..." (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEPP and DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"And then of course working together as a team is also a very good experience, working across projects within the organisation." (Interview, National volunteer, Nefkens & V4D Health, Moroto and Napak districts)*

In relation to Covid-19, data from both Uganda and Tanzania underline that blended volunteering was essential in enabling an agile response to the pandemic, especially in the early stages, meaning that projects were able to be more resilient and to adapt to changing circumstances in ways that would not have been possible with a single volunteer modality, especially if projects were relying solely on international volunteers. The identification of this agility in two settings is a significant finding, confirming the value of blended volunteering as an effective model in the context of crisis and stress in contrasting settings. In particular, VSO staff indicate the importance of a quick response, the mobilisation of national volunteers, and a shift in focus of projects, in enabling them to effectively tackle the difficulties brought on by the pandemic:

*"Of course with the lockdown, the immediate lockdown last year following the outbreak of Covid, first, everything had to be put on hold, but along the way when they started easing lockdown, we had to also reprogramme some of the grants that were running, we had to reprogramme to suit the current context, but that was in consultation with their respective donors, to ensure that reprogramming is in really, the donor is in agreement with that reprogramming, and then respond accordingly." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 3)*

*"So, given the current operating environment, of course we are a bit restrained, that is why we have only national volunteers. But certainly of course I can say that they are also very big resource. They have put in whatever it takes, they've brought in their expertise, they've brought in their knowledge, they've brought in their experience and there is a valuable contribution they're putting into the way we are running projects." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 5)*

*"...the pandemic is teaching us how to, you know, to use what we have." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 4)*

Reflecting discussions in section 4.1.1, the role of national volunteers is identified as pivotal here in enabling this rapid response, repositioning and project continuity:

*"Like in Uganda right now, we actually, we survive with the situation. But now, if [international volunteers] were to come to Uganda right now you would have a lot of fear, for example, this Covid here, we know that once you have like a, other complications, it is actually easier to be more vulnerable, than when you don't have such complications. Now imagine a situation where you have come with a complication from your country. You can't adapt easily to the current situation, if anything you will be more vulnerable than me, who's in Uganda here. So [...] a national [person is] adapting quickly, and actually able to work. We're working, actually, with volunteers quite well with the situation, the situation right now." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)*

However, we note that this is another instance where there is a degree of blurriness as to whether the use of the term 'national' in this case also encompasses community volunteers, as discussed earlier.

Volunteers and primary actors also reflected on how projects were able to adapt and evolve in order to continue to have an impact in communities despite the pandemic:

*"I think [VSO] followed the right channel; first got in touch with the district local government and that is the district education office. Of course they first wrote letters through the education office explaining the importance of conducting home based learning under this Covid-19 lockdown, they made phone calls to education department, head teachers and then the School Management Committees chairpersons, Parent Teachers Association chairpersons, board members and they also had a [stakeholder] meeting. Those people were called and they were explained on how to conduct home based learning [...] And then after that, volunteers were identified through those very people and after identifying them, they were called for a training, I think on how best to start the home-based learning, on the methodologies on how to conduct home based learning in the villages. Then after that the volunteers were told to start with the work; volunteers started with work and then monitoring by VSO, District local government, education office and other key stakeholders. So that is how this started."* (Interview, Primary actor, A-PLUS, Moroto district)

*"I could say that scale and the reach I remember at one point we wanted to reach 200 young people during the pandemic with the work readiness and the soft skills training. There wasn't any way we could bring this 200 people or maybe a hundred in a conference hall and have the training done like that but what we did we used the community volunteers and that was done in a record of 2 weeks and all these people were reached and these people received the training on the financial literacy how to draft a very good business plan and then the process of securing a grant."* (Interview, National volunteer, YEPP, Gulu district)

Participants in Uganda also reflected on the utility of remote volunteering to sustain a blended approach despite the challenges of the pandemic, also reflecting our findings on this in Tanzania:

*"You know, before Covid we had all the kinds of volunteers from the community, the national, international, and e-volunteers. So now under V4D I have two national volunteers, I have the peer educators that I call community volunteers, as well one e-volunteer who is based in the Netherlands who supports the team in Uganda together with the health workforce in the monitored hospitals."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 2)

In particular, the remote volunteering modality provides scope for sustaining the blend in relation to enabling input from professionals with particular expertise during times when travel is not possible, or over a longer time period than, for example, a typical short-term corporate volunteer placement. This is significant for debates around the role of remote volunteering, highlighting not simply the digital mode and remoteness, but how this articulates with other forms of volunteering.

Overall then, the data from Uganda underlines the extent to which the blended volunteering model enables a high degree of adaptability, ensuring that VSO projects are well placed to respond robustly to unexpected change and crisis, giving projects the highest chance of success in a context of ongoing change and unpredictability. While on the one hand, we emphasise the importance of the particular contexts of volunteering, and the ways this shapes how the blend is understood and operates, at the same time, data across Tanzania and Uganda highlight its scope as an international programming approach, and one that the sector more widely can learn from in the context of crisis and – unexpected and/or planned – reductions in international mobility.

#### **4.1.4 Looking forward**

In exploring the ways in which **different volunteering modalities contribute value to VSO's work with primary actors**, the research in Tanzania and Uganda raises a number of questions about the interaction of volunteering modalities that can help refine the blended volunteering model for VSO and other volunteer-involving organisations, and strengthen development outcomes for primary actors and their communities.

In particular, the Uganda case study foregrounds the following question:

- ♦ *How can project planning effectively capture individuals' roles and expertise in order to facilitate a greater focus on these attributes and de-emphasise geographically defined modalities, in order to strengthen the blended approach and enable greater adaptability in contexts of reduced international mobility?*

The research in Uganda also further underlines the relevance of the questions that emerged from the Tanzania case study:

- ♦ *How can understanding volunteer categories as dynamic and unstable, and working with volunteers to identify their own definitions and perceptions of particular modalities, contribute to shaping VSO's strategic planning and volunteer management?*
- ♦ *How might a recognition that volunteer knowledge and expertise do not directly align with particular volunteering modalities, inform strategies to build equity in project relationships?*
- ♦ *How can understanding the blend as dynamic and acknowledging diversity within categories, be incorporated into future programming and planning, rather than being seen as something to be managed out?*

## 4.2 Making the blend work

### RESEARCH QUESTION 2: How might different volunteering modalities be combined to maximise development impact?

Our analysis of blended volunteering in the Ugandan context sheds light on the relevance of adaptive management in project implementation and the importance of situating the blend within wider volunteer economies, while also strengthening findings from the Tanzania case study on the added value of the blend to development outcomes. In this regard, we identify three key issues arising from the research question:

- ♦ **Volunteer combinations add value to development outcomes.** As we found in Tanzania, the use of a blend of volunteers in Uganda is beneficial to development projects and recognised as a key factor in maximising project outcomes in context-specific and iterative ways. The blended model in Uganda also enhances the personal and professional development of volunteers, with a particular emphasis on their learning pathways and on the importance of nurturing opportunities for different volunteers to work *with* each other in sustained ways.
- ♦ **The role of adaptive management in sustaining the blend.** Adaptive management strategies are central to maximising the effectiveness of blended volunteering in Uganda, particularly when it comes to enhancing communication channels and promoting continued opportunities for different volunteering modalities to collaborate with each other.
- ♦ **Blended volunteering in the context of volunteer economies.** Blended volunteering needs to be situated within a wider context of volunteer economies and livelihoods in Uganda and beyond, as the dynamics of volunteer allowances and its perceived overlaps with paid work can be construed differently by the distinct volunteering modalities, and projects' stakeholders.

Each of these key issues is explored in further depth below, deepening and building upon learning from the Tanzania case study. In particular, the Ugandan case study presents us with a greater depth of data that situates the blended volunteering model in relation to volunteer economies and livelihoods, providing an important opportunity for the research to contribute to emerging debates within the sector.

#### **4.2.1 Volunteer combinations add value to development outcomes**

*As we found in Tanzania, the use of a blend of volunteers in Uganda is beneficial to development practice areas and recognised as a key factor in maximising project outcomes in context-specific and iterative ways. The blended model in Uganda also enhances the personal and professional development of volunteers, with a particular emphasis on their learning pathways and on the importance of nurturing opportunities for different volunteers to work with each other in sustained ways.*

All participants in interviews and workshops in Uganda – across volunteers, staff, partners and primary actors – spoke highly about the value of blended volunteering, both in terms of their own personal experience and also in relation to the project implementation in the education, health and livelihoods practice areas. This case study thus reinforces our Tanzanian findings. The added value of the blend to the learning pathways of volunteers was particularly emphasised by participants in Uganda, who focused on the sharing of ideas and knowledge by people from different backgrounds as a key asset facilitated by the blended approach:

*"I think according to my own view, what I benefited from this group of volunteers is that I was able to learn a lot from some other people and they were also able to learn a lot from me and I was able also to at least be a shoulder for the others to step because sometimes when you don't know something you feel like at least there should be someone who could pull you up." (Workshop with community volunteers, YEOP, Gulu district)*

*"I think there will not be much learning [by working with only one type of volunteers], since learning is a continuous process. Working with only one type of volunteers would not make sense to me." (Interview, National & ICS volunteer, VI-GREAT, Moroto district)*

*"So, there was a cross-fertilisation of ideas among the international volunteers and the national volunteers. They were never selfish with their knowledge." (Interview, National volunteer, A-PLUS, Moroto District)*

The notion of 'cross-fertilisation of ideas' mentioned above by the national volunteer, highlights how reliant blended volunteering is on the openness of people in collectively sharing their knowledge and co-developing solutions. This provides a new connection to debates about the role of volunteering in processes of skills and professional development beyond individual volunteer experiences. Joint learning and co-development is thus not only about improving development outcomes in the context of specific projects, but supports longer capacities and developments collectively and individually, which themselves support livelihoods and development. The togetherness that both results from, and is facilitated by, the blend is, however, not restricted to volunteer relationships but extends to the wider stakeholders involved in each project (see section 4.3). The Ugandan case also reveals a strong focus on the relationships between volunteers and partners and/or community actors in the wider blend (see section 4.3.2). Staff emphasise the importance of listening and respect as part of this overarching learning environment, as well as highlighting how the blended volunteering approach improves efficiency in project implementation:

*"It is that listening and respect and learning that come through when the people from different backgrounds and different environments interact together." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 3)*

*"So, of course, now the blending, of course, it will mean that we have a pool of knowledge and resources, again because at the end of the day we have, we are coming from different backgrounds, different levels of trainings and different skill sets. So basically when you bring people of different skills together, they will improve on efficiency of implementing projects. They bring innovations in terms of project management, in terms of handling problems and challenges that are in programming." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 5)*

Such positive effects of the blend in project implementation were perceived widely across activities in Uganda. Here, one of the national volunteers in the YEEP project explained how each modality contributed particular value to the project's mentorship objectives, something that they believe would not have been possible without the different volunteers that were part of the blend:

*"I: Do you think you would have been able to carry out [these] activities in this project with only one type of volunteer? R: No. We need all these types of volunteers to be on board so that we develop synergy to propel things forward. We need each other, we need all this because we wouldn't have reached the 200 people without the peer educators, without the community of educators, and also we wouldn't have got those concrete career guidance advice on how to write our CVs if these international volunteers were not here." (Interview, National volunteer, YEEP, Gulu District)*

In this project, the presence of corporate volunteers in the blend was particularly emphasised by different participants because of their specific skillsets in entrepreneurship, governance and finances that were combined with the local knowledge and expertise (as part of the role-based approach discussed in section 4.1.2):

*"When you had the need to build a capacity, or the partner is more on corporate issues and governance, the corporate volunteers became very, very handy, because the people from other big companies in Europe, they know a lot about governance, corporate governance, human resource, financial planning, so they are also able to come in that gap, to fill in, with the corporate kind of issues, for those small organisations. So to me, I saw a lot of benefit to mix the volunteers." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)*

*"I think that, especially in the YEEP project, that Randstad has brought a lot of knowledge, I think that's brought a lot. We bring some experience that was not there and so I think, like I was saying, that the combination is really good." (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEEP and DYNAMIC, Gulu District)*

This shows how the blended approach looks and works differently between projects, therefore optimal results can be achieved when the context and thematic areas of interest are taken into account in project planning and implementation. In other words, rather than volunteering modalities, the key issue is the specific development need. In this case, the blend becomes a key factor in the successful implementation of livelihoods projects and improved development impacts in that area. This was also perceived across the health and education practice areas analysed in the Uganda case study, emphasising previous findings from the Tanzanian case study that experiences of the blended approach were predominantly positive. The unique value of the blend in project implementation was summarised by a staff member in relation to how it facilitates change at different levels at the same time:

*"I think when it's blended, it addresses the changes at different levels that we want at the same time. Like, when we have someone strategically at the higher level coming and working in the programme and [this person] is more exposed, it helps drive everyone to move towards achieving the objectives." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 2)*

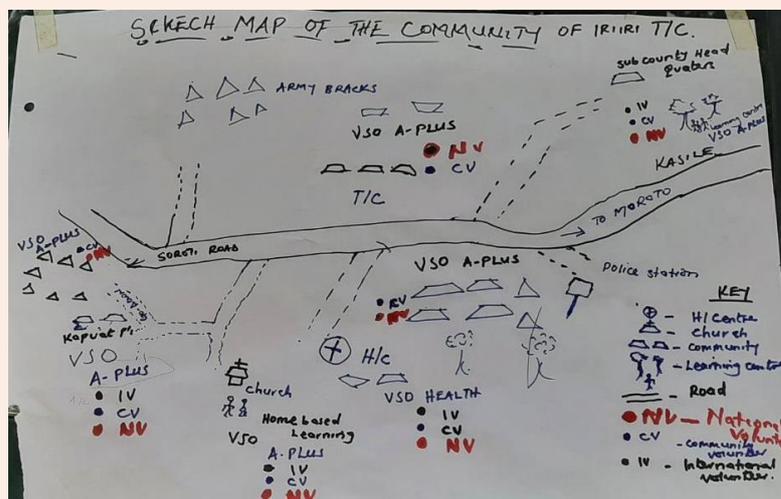
These changes at different levels also mean strengthening capacity-building and long-lasting impacts of the projects at community level through an emphasis on the contributions of each individual that is part of the blend. This emphasises the potential of blended volunteering as a key strategy in VSO's relational volunteering model, tackling its five dimensions of change: inclusion, innovation, ownership, participation and inspiration (Burns et al., 2015a). More than a result in itself, the volunteer combinations in the blend also become a way of animating further relationships leading to sustainable change, such as in the example below raised by volunteers involved in livelihoods activities:

*"We are about to finish the trainings on time through supporting each other, for example where someone has little knowledge the other one who has more knowledge would help him or her. So we built our capacity, working together promote good working relationships. Then also working together strengthens our connection. For example, for some of us who did financial literacy and business [trainings] among our own peers, we found markets and some of them helped us to market our product." (Workshop with national and community volunteers, Nefkens and YEEP, Gulu district)*

The Uganda case study thus highlights the multiple ways in which the blended approach reinforces the resilience of individuals and communities in ways that they identify as important (see section 4.3.3). However, having different volunteering modalities present at the same time on the same projects does not necessarily mean they will be working *together*. This relates to the strategic role of VSO management in facilitating effective blended volunteering work, to which we now turn.

### BOX A. PARTICIPATORY MAPPING: SITUATING THE BLEND IN PLACE

The community mapping activities in Uganda were conducted in workshops with groups of volunteers and primary actors, both separately and in mixed groups. This was part of the research's participatory approach for provoking creative conversations about the realities of blended volunteering in project implementation, situating the presence of the distinct modalities in each locality. The different maps produced by participants showcase how particular volunteer combinations were located in specific local areas, as in the example of **Figure 3** that shows the community of Iriri, Moroto district.



**Figure 3: Workshop with Volunteers, Mapping Activity, Moroto District**  
Source: Northumbria University research team

On the one hand, the figure shows the presence of international, national, and community volunteers across education and health project locations such as learning and health centres; on the other, it also highlights the presence of only national and community volunteers in the spaces identified as 'community' – which speaks to their local embeddedness and closer relationships with primary actors. Overall, participants demonstrated in-depth knowledge about VSO's different areas of work in their localities. Additionally, former volunteers highlighted the types of activities performed together with other volunteers in specific places in the maps, also emphasising the importance of work ethics and transparency when discussing challenges and brainstorming solutions.

### 4.2.2 The role of adaptive management in sustaining the blend

Adaptive management strategies are central to maximising the effectiveness of blended volunteering in Uganda, particularly when it comes to enhancing communication channels and promoting continued opportunities for different volunteering modalities to collaborate with each other.

A key challenge leading to perceived or actual tensions and hierarchies between volunteers in the blended model in Uganda relates to the role of VSO management in continuously supporting the blend, and 'making it happen' beyond the recruitment of different modalities to be part of the same project. Although differences in terms of culture and behaviours, and interpersonal challenges arising from those, were also sometimes mentioned as challenge areas by volunteer participants, these were not raised as frequently in Uganda as in the Tanzanian context. The focus on adaptive management in Uganda reflects the reported need for closer supervision of, and attention to, the responsibilities of different volunteering modalities in the blend, as well as strengthening communication channels not only among volunteers, but also between volunteers and the other stakeholders in the projects. This is also related to the volunteer allowance system, and the ways it can affect the perceived status attached to distinct modalities, which we will discuss in the next section in relation to wider volunteer economies identified in Uganda.

The research in Uganda highlights that across all projects in the sample, different volunteering modalities were enrolled at the same time and were delivering quality service to primary actors. However, this does not necessarily mean that different modalities were necessarily actively collaborating *with each other* in the implementation of activities, as one international volunteer observed:

*“So on VI-GREAT, I think the idea was that international and national volunteers would work together; whereas in reality the activities were quite different. So, the international volunteer was implementing activities and the national volunteer was implementing different activities, so rather than working together on one activity [it happened] through two separate activities.”* (Interview, International professional volunteer, A-PLUS and VI-GREAT, Moroto and Napak Districts)

In the quote above, the participant explains how different modalities were responsible for different activities in the education project, which meant that although there were different types of volunteers involved in the project, they were not necessarily together. In instances where volunteers are working ‘alongside’ each other in this way, we cannot strictly speak of ‘blended’ volunteering, where the key aspect is working *together*. This highlights how the value of the *blend* needs to be assimilated by all stakeholders involved in project design and implementation in order to increase the associated outcomes of the model. The challenge of achieving an optimal way of blended working was also highlighted by community volunteers involved in livelihoods projects, as in the excerpt below:

*“International volunteers you could only meet them when we are, like, for a meeting or we are [there] for a workshop and other things and the same applies to this because we could have a workshop in Kitgum, we could have a workshop in Karamoja, so it is only through that that we could meet up, where we met the local people and also the international.”* (Interview, Community volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu District)

This volunteer participant explains how, despite being involved in the same project, their opportunities of effectively interacting with international volunteers were limited to workshops or meetings – therefore constrained in time and space to more institutional settings. Once again, this suggests that distinct modalities were key to the successful implementation of activities, however there was a perceived need to nurture better opportunities for different volunteers to work *with each other*. This is particularly the case given the learning opportunities and potential wider legacy impacts from the blended approach identified above. In the Tanzanian case study we identified the importance of adaptive management strategies for VSO to respond to the fluidity of blended volunteering practices, particularly when it comes to potential interpersonal conflicts within and across modalities. In Uganda, volunteers have emphasised the importance of greater guidance in their everyday activities and the need for increased support from staff members to allow the blended approach to succeed:

*“I also think if we are talking about blended models of volunteering, I don’t think you can just put nationals, internationals and community volunteers in the field and expect that they blend together. So, I think there a lot of work needs to be done to find ways to help people work together because I think if you don’t do that, what happens is that people just do activities on their own and you lose the benefit of the blended approach. So, I think VSO needs to think a lot more about how they can get people to work together on activities. At the moment I think it is just left up to the volunteers themselves to decide how to do that but I think VSO needs to be more involved in steering it and making sure that it happens because that is the ideal thing if you can get nationals and internationals working well together, it’s the best approach.”* (Interview, International professional volunteer, A-PLUS and VI-GREAT, Moroto and Napak Districts)

*“So that was also why the project was not continuing really, really fast because we didn’t have really good guidance. [The national volunteer] was there and we were there, only volunteers, and that’s why we were, well I don’t want to say lost, but a little bit lost in the focus, what can we do? How much money is there to spend or not to spend? Which focus? Where do we go?”* (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEPP and DYNAMIC, Gulu District)

When reflecting on their volunteering placements in Uganda, international volunteer participants have often praised the blended approach as an opportunity for learning and integration within their projects and local communities, as mentioned earlier (see section 4.2.1). However, as we can see in the quotes above, volunteers have also raised challenges in relation to the practicalities of the blend in Uganda. This was mainly due to the reported need for closer supervision to make sure that the blended approach was as efficient as it could be – not only to achieve the project’s aims but also to create enabling environments for volunteers to thrive as a team.

*“VSO did not precisely tell us how to work as colleagues in this project; because I was assigned to come and work in Moroto and Napak; while my other colleagues were sent to Abim, to Amudat, to Nabilatuk, to Kaabong, so, we did the same work actually independently. But when we go for planning purposes, we plan the work together and, at the end of the day, it is expected that we will be doing the same thing although of course with minor details, variations depending on the different locations.”* (Interview, National volunteer, A-PLUS, Moroto District)

*“I’ve also learnt to work with minimal supervision whether someone has come or not.”* (Interview, Community volunteer 1, A-PLUS, Napak district)

The seeds of the blend were certainly present in project design, as shown above in terms of planning and also explained in section 4.1.1, however the Ugandan case highlights the importance of cultivating the blended approach thoroughly throughout the implementation of activities. The national volunteer quoted above explains how the group of volunteers were involved in planning and training activities together but later deployed to work independently in each location. The centrality of listening and communication was perceived as key not only among volunteers but also between them and other relevant stakeholders in each project.

*“Communication both within ourselves to VSO and also from VSO to us at times there was poor communication. [...] My comment to VSO is that when they have already recruited their peer educators they should regularly follow up their peer educators. Then the second one they should also improve on their facilitation to peer educators and other volunteers in order to motivate them and also to support them.”* (Workshop with national and community volunteers, Nefkens and YEEP, Gulu district)

*“I think the M&E [Monitoring and Evaluation] people need to design clear things for us to know that, ‘okay, now that we are going to disperse information we want to see the following ABCD’ so that even as the health workers when we go out we know that the project is going to look at ABCD because it has to be presented to us what do you expect from us because the outreaches was done in numbers and it was okay. I give you an example, now even this current project which is majorly community that much as we are also implementing as the stakeholders, we need to be guided, we need to be guided on what is expected.”* (Interview, Primary Actor, V4D Health, Napak district)

There was an overall perception from participants of the need to improve existing understandings among stakeholders during project activities, and of the expected roles of VSO management in supporting this process, in order for the blended approach to be as effective as possible. Hence, we identify that there is scope to provide further guidance and information for volunteers, primary actors and partners, about how different modalities can contribute to the blend, in order to increase effectiveness as well as improve understanding of the strengths of the blended volunteering model in relation to long-term development outcomes of VSO projects. Paradoxically, and as discussed earlier, this happens against a backdrop of greater fluidity across categories in Uganda, which de-centres the associations of particular place-based modalities to certain skills and knowledge in the blend. The request in the quote above for improved ‘facilitation’ (i.e., financial compensation) is essentially related to the financial implications of undertaking volunteering, particularly among marginalised groups. This was a recurrent theme in this case study, albeit perceived differently by international, national and community volunteers. In light of such perceptions, the next section will explore how the differentiation of volunteers that is at the core of the blended approach needs to be contextualised within the wider picture of volunteer economies in the sector, and in Uganda in particular.

### 4.2.3 Blended volunteering in the context of volunteer economies

*Blended volunteering needs to be situated within a wider context of volunteer economies and livelihoods in Uganda and beyond, as the dynamics of volunteer allowances and its perceived overlaps with paid work can be construed differently by the distinct volunteering modalities, and projects' stakeholders.*

The Uganda case study spotlights the connections of volunteering with livelihoods as a key part of the debate about the 'blend', driving the successful implementation of the model and its sustained impacts on the ground. The perceived differences in the types of benefits for volunteers (e.g., contracts, allowances, accommodation, equipment) were identified in Tanzania as part of the critical dilemma intrinsic to the differentiation of volunteering modalities. In Uganda, this challenge was particularly evident in the ways volunteer allowances or stipends – also referred to as 'facilitation' – were often mentioned by volunteers and stakeholders as a key area of concern, also reflecting on the roles and expectations seemingly attached to each volunteer modality according to their perceived status and remuneration.

Firstly, although national and international volunteers in the sample reported receiving the same allowance, they interpreted it differently. While international volunteers understood the allowance as a stipend, national volunteers often saw it as a source of livelihood, and a form of work rather than volunteering, likely due to high unemployment rates in Uganda, particularly among youth (Tukundane & Kanyandago, 2021). This finding relates to wider research about this theme in different settings in the global South, highlighting how volunteering and employment are entangled in multiple ways (Hunter & Ross, 2013; Prince & Brown, 2016). In Uganda in particular, we notice how humanitarian and development organisations become an intrinsic part of the volunteering and livelihood ecosystems (Okech et al., 2021). This was explained by a staff member as follows:

*"For internationals and nationals, you find that it [the volunteer allowance] is a livelihood for most national volunteers here. [...] But you find that for most of the international volunteers we have, some might have taken a break off their work that really pays them well considering the European allowance. We pay a certain allowance to the volunteers, yeah? So you find that that's OK for them, you know? But for the nationals, you find that, being an allowance, but remember they have, some of them have big families to look after, probably it's your only livelihood." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 4)*

The connection above with livelihoods reflects the ways volunteering also becomes part of career pathways not only because of the types of skillsets expected for undertaking particular roles in the blend (see section 4.1.1), but also because of how the allowances system is interpreted in relation to local economies. Moreover, it also relates to the fact that some VSO volunteers can effectively later become VSO employees, as noted in the Tanzania case study. This can further complicate the ways local actors perceive national and community volunteers, which might also be influenced by the types of volunteer placements and the different roles of partners in supporting such placements. This is part of a wider sectoral debate about volunteer remuneration (Baillie Smith et al., 2020; see also Jenkins, 2009b). On the one hand, financial compensation is increasingly recognised as part of the enabling environment for volunteering to happen among and within marginalised communities; on the other, it needs to be handled carefully in terms of the potential creation of dependencies and hierarchies (see also Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015). In relation to the particular dynamics of blended volunteering in Uganda, the multiple perceptions around financial and material rewards had important implications for the ways volunteer relationships were built, potentially distancing national and international volunteers from their community peers in the blend:

*"Community volunteers expect a lot from us because they say 'you're the ones who are within the organisation, can you also get for us laptops like you have, can you guys also drop us in your nice vehicles'; those expectations or maybe 'after these can you guys give us certificates', yeah or 'can you also give us opportunity to be volunteers like you, so managing'." (Interview, National volunteer, YEPP, Gulu District)*

As a consequence of the managerial tasks often assumed by international and national volunteers in such spaces, in practice their roles are also often interpreted by stakeholders as analogous to staff attributions, however without carrying the same status:

*"[T]here are scenarios where the volunteers are not heard, yet at the beginning we hardly know that this is even a volunteer, this is a staff... you see, in other context when someone says 'this is a volunteer' it makes that difference, the element of undermining will just come in." (Interview, Partner, Nefkens, Gulu District)*

The overlaps between volunteering and employment were also evident in staff reflections on the perspective of government officials in Uganda, who might interpret volunteering as a form of paid work particularly when the dynamics of international placements in the blend come into play:

*"Why [are] you having to bring in the foreigners to work in Uganda?' for them [the government], they see it as work, they see it as work. Not volunteering. The government sees volunteering as your work, paid work. They ask you how much do they – you tell them, 'just an allowance', 'what, that's money!' that could also be given to a local person who has been out of university with some experience." (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)*

Once again, this resonates with wider debates on overlaps between voluntary and paid work in the face of financial compensation, which often framed expectations and also the ways community volunteering was described by participants in the research, such as in the excerpts below from the participatory discussions:

*"I'm working with it [VSO] as peer educator. And I am well known in the sub county even in the villages that have been working in, so I appreciate VSO for giving me this training and opportunity to work as a paid educator." (Workshop with national and community volunteers, Nefkens and YEPP, Gulu district)*

*"I [community volunteer] had a lot of expectations like a lot of money. To my surprise I was given little money ... I advise that VSO to find a way of motivating workers so that we also continue providing quality work we're doing." (Workshop with primary actors and community volunteers, V4D Health & A-PLUS, Napak district)*

In terms of implications for the blended approach, this also means that additional efforts have been needed to manage overall expectations, particularly from community volunteers, in relation to the ways allowances were processed:

*"...it worked that they accepted, we would say [to community volunteers] 'this is not, this is not salary, it is just a stipend, I mean allowance for you to get more, I mean, exposure, experience and, with the time [it can] take you for a certificate, simple certificate and then from that maybe you go for a diploma and even a degree.'" (Interview, International South-South volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"...these other community [volunteers] are the teachers who are currently engaged in the home-based learning as volunteers; they don't directly get any salary attached to their work, it's just a voluntary service." (Interview, Partner, A-PLUS, Napak district)*

The types and amounts of financial support received by community volunteers, as well as the timeliness of their disbursement, had important effects not only in maintaining the teams' morale, but also in particular when their allowance was not seen as sufficient to cover the costs of volunteering. This was directly related to the success of project implementation through the blended approach, notably because of the local mobility required of community volunteers and their continuous movement across settings.

*"These payments could not meet the standards of living that we have in the country. Yeah, the cost involved in it. Like, you are given transport allowance, but this transport allowance cannot even take you to the field and come back to office, so it was really a challenge."* (Interview, Community volunteer, YEOP, Gulu District)

*"...when somebody devotes their time sometimes they're doing other things and they are devoting their time to do for you a few things like that, you need to show them that you really care, you value the time that they are also devoting by facilitating them better. If I'm supposed to travel from the distance of 10 km, make sure that the transportation is available and on time, so by facilitating them better and also after their engagement something, some recognition has to be there. I haven't seen where VSO has so much recognised the contributions of these community volunteers. [...] So we always need to keep them close and supported full time so that they work better."* (Interview, National volunteer, YEOP, Gulu district)

*"...and probably facilitate them with some bicycles; because you know they have to walk long distances; with bicycles to ease their movement to different places. You know, I cite one volunteer walking over 10km every day; which is cumbersome."* (Interview, Partner, A-PLUS, Napak district)

Here, the data from Uganda in relation to the stipends further underlines the importance of specific contexts, and the ways that sense-making around volunteering and the blends of volunteers does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is often related to livelihood strategies. This was also raised in Tanzania, but in Uganda it is particularly significant in relation to financial rewards, and the strong associations between volunteering and work within the country. Financial support is thus not only about what volunteers *do*, but also who volunteer *are*, both of which have implications for then creating a blend that is as effective and inclusive as possible.

#### **4.2.4 Looking forward**

When analysing the data from Tanzania and Uganda on the ways in which **different volunteering modalities might be combined to maximise development impact**, the findings from both contexts raise a number of pertinent questions for academics, practitioners and policymakers working in these spaces. In particular, the Uganda case study highlights the following question:

- ♦ *How can different stakeholders reach a shared understanding of what counts as volunteering in order to achieve equal forms of recognition and treatment across volunteering modalities?*

The Uganda case study also reaffirms points raised in Tanzania for practitioners to reflect upon how the ways in which volunteering modalities interact can further refine the blended volunteering model:

- ♦ *What considerations might be made in project design, monitoring and evaluation, to support the flattening of hierarchies and promote more equitable opportunities across different volunteering modalities, to maximise the development impacts of the blend?*
- ♦ *How can tensions around perceived and real differences in skills, status and reward for volunteers be managed to facilitate team integration and minimise power imbalances?*
- ♦ *How might we best manage primary actor and community expectations regarding differentiation of skills and modalities within the blend?*

## 4.3 Maximising development impact

### RESEARCH QUESTION 3. What are the conditions that contribute to maximising the impact of diverse volunteering modalities, both as individuals, and as teams?

Our analysis of data from Uganda validates our previous findings from Tanzania, while also identifying new elements to strengthen the analysis on three key issues arising from the research question:

- ◆ **Project phases and the blend ‘over time’.** As in Tanzania, factors external to the ‘blend’ impact the effectiveness of the model in Uganda, with a particular emphasis on how long-term knowledge and project-based expertise of key volunteers can improve the workings of the blend throughout a project cycle.
- ◆ **Blended volunteering and community experiences.** By reaffirming that blended volunteering does not exist in a vacuum, the Uganda case highlights how the embeddedness of the blend in local communities, and the ways it helps understand and navigate priorities of different stakeholders, play a key role in the success of ongoing projects.
- ◆ **Resilience and project legacy in communities.** Blended volunteering has the potential to enhance legacy and sustained impacts for development of VSO projects, with the Ugandan case shedding new light on how the wider blend of volunteers with communities and their aspirations can enhance project resilience and lasting outputs.

As with the previous research questions, our findings in Uganda support the findings from Tanzania, although there are some differences that we explore in more detail. In this section, we build on previous learning in relation to the importance of conceptualising the wider blend, and explain how the Ugandan case emphasises the contribution made by very long-term volunteers and their knowledge, and enables us to explore particular aspects of the blend that support project resilience over time.

#### 4.3.1 Project phases and the blend ‘over time’

*As in Tanzania, factors external to the ‘blend’ impact the effectiveness of the model in Uganda, with a particular emphasis on how long-term knowledge and project-based expertise of key volunteers can improve the workings of the blend throughout a project cycle.*

The research shows how inclusion and participation are enhanced over the course of project implementation, based on learning from the blended volunteering model. This further underlines the way blended volunteering creates particular learning and development opportunities, something that came out much more strongly in Uganda than Tanzania. This may partly reflect the ways volunteering is strongly linked to skills acquisition and work. However, it also shows how the blended approach can create particular learning and development environments, and that nurturing and supporting these underscores a range of project and development outcomes. While we found examples of less-than-optimal blending in Tanzania and Uganda (see also section 4.2.2), learning from this case study reinforces the increasingly important roles assumed by Ugandan volunteers in the blend. The recognition of their unique contributions to the blended model was echoed across stakeholders in Uganda:

*“... through the learnings, and the reviews we saw that yes: a local person, a national person, in the community, who have the skills, brings more, in terms of the local context.” (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)*

*“...they would understand more since they have lived in the community, they know, yes. They understand the people, they know the language.” (Interview, Community volunteer 1, YEPP, Gulu District)*

Our findings from Uganda also emphasise how the fluidity of the blend is also influenced by several contextual factors, including project stage, volunteer cohort overlaps and handovers, and placement duration:

*"...they [the volunteers] used to stay within short time, a short time then they go away, then they leave. There are some individuals who stay in two months then you see they're telling you that 'ah, [Name], next week we are going', surprisingly, yet you still have a lot to share with them and that disadvantage, is not an individual or on those volunteers, but because of the programme which is scheduled by VSO."* (Interview, Partner, Nefkens, Gulu District)

*"Then our community volunteers how they remain committed because each time one is leaving, they were very active to propose a replacement, up to now we have not had a very high dropout which was a good thing."* (Interview, Primary Actor, V4D Health, Napak district)

*"[T]hey [international, national and community volunteers] came in the specific period with the required specific interest which means that they did not have the stages of the working. They just come always with their specific interest and with a specific required period."* (Workshop with primary actors, DYNAMIC, Nefkens and YEEP, Gulu district)

*"...international volunteers also they have a timeline, they bring them based on periods as well because someone can stay, probably they can get time off and they could volunteer in a project maybe for a year. So after a year, if the project is ongoing, then we have to make sure there will be another volunteer. That is, even national, coming to serve on that project."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 4)

Additional knowledge from Uganda sheds new light on the importance of duration of stays for the sustainability and resilience of projects. While VSO considers volunteering timeframes of over three months as 'long-term' volunteering, here we draw attention to experiences of what may be considered 'very long-term' volunteering, understood as volunteering commitments lasting *more* than one year.

*"I'm working with VSO and I've worked with them for 5 years now. I work there as a volunteer teacher in ... Napak district."* (Interview, Community volunteer 2, A-PLUS, Napak district)

*"I have worked for youth employment enhancement project funded by Citi foundation and Randstad [YEEP]. I can say that I started it right up from the beginning of the project, the project was initiated in 2017, so I started working in 2018, the activities had just begun. So I worked on that project for about 3 years."* (Interview, National volunteer, YEEP, Gulu district)

*"I was there [in Uganda] for three years ... 2017 to last year [2020]."* (Interview, International South-South volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu District)

We found several examples of this in the data from Uganda, and we suggest that the ability of community volunteers to make long-term commitments is a key aspect of the roles they play within projects – on top of their 'rootedness' in place, explored in the Tanzania report. Furthermore, we found more instances of 'very long-term' national and international volunteers in Uganda than in Tanzania. While we can speculate that the nature of volunteering involvement may change over the course of long-term commitments, accounts both from these volunteers themselves, as well as others who worked with them, indicated the important role of these established volunteers within teams:

*"I was seeing that, for this programme, there's a very strong challenge, having short-term volunteers [that] come for six months, they go away, at most eight months they're away."* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 1)

*"We also worked with the national volunteer who was always..., [the volunteer] was there all the time, [they] also [were] there for phase one in the project, so [they have] the continuous knowledge of everything."* (Interview, International corporate volunteer, YEEP and DYNAMIC, Gulu District)

As 'very long-term' volunteers remained on projects, they played a pivotal role in smooth transitioning of new volunteers into the project, thereby becoming the 'glue' that held the blend together over time and across team transitions, being knowledgeable about the ins and outs of the project over time.

*"I would say as a team, due to my... I think interpersonal relations skills, I was able to work with them very well, and I think in fact I'm the longest serving there because all the others who do ... take one year, one, yeah, just one year [...], but I'm done, made it up to three years. Actually my placement initially was one year, then I was asked to go for the second year and for the third year."* (Interview, International South-South volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu District)

This quote from an international South-South volunteer, explaining they were asked to stay on the project, indicates that VSO Uganda staff may recognise the benefits of having very long-term volunteering placements; further formalising longer-term volunteer positions may bring benefits for the resilience and sustainable outcomes of VSO projects. This speaks directly to an issue identified in the Tanzania fieldwork, which highlighted potential challenges arising from the loss of continuity in blends as different volunteers inevitably 'come and go' across a project cycle. While this dilemma is hard to solve in a blended model, the Uganda case study highlights the value of even a single longer-term volunteer in supporting the blend. However, we also emphasise that this very long-term volunteering is not without its challenges, especially in relation to individual community volunteers who can end up shouldering a disproportionate responsibility for delivering projects, without always receiving sufficient recognition or support for this (see also Jenkins, 2009b). It is thus important that assumptions are not made only on the basis of geography and length of placement, which could lead to undue pressure on volunteers. Hence a degree of caution is needed here in operationalising these benefits for projects whilst balancing individual volunteers' needs.

#### **Box B. SCENARIO BUILDING: INSIGHTS ON A 'PERFECT PROJECT'**

*Participatory workshops with primary actors and former volunteers included an exercise on designing potential future projects for VSO. This exercise showed that VSO is well established on the ground in Uganda and there is a strong appetite for future interventions through the blended volunteering approach. Participants embraced VSO's previous projects in different areas, such as piggery, poultry and hairdressing, and reflected on ways to further integrate livelihood components into these types of projects in the future. In designing their perfect project, and considering the blend of volunteers that they would choose to be involved, participants reflected on the value of a mix of community, national and international volunteers but especially highlighted the central role for community volunteers in ensuring project success due to their familiarity with the context and particular needs.*



**Figure 4: Workshop with Volunteers and Primary Actors, Scenario Building Activity, Moroto District. Source:** Northumbria University team

*Workshop participants identified a need for more training for both the primary actors and volunteers who will be engaged in the projects, as well as considering how to better include more vulnerable community members, such as people with disabilities, child mothers, and child-headed families. Participants have also particularly highlighted the importance of teamwork across the different modalities as essential to project success, as well as emphasising issues around access to transportation, remuneration, and being readily identifiable as a VSO volunteer, as other key considerations in designing the perfect project.*

### 4.3.2 Blended volunteering and community experiences

*By reaffirming that blended volunteering does not exist in a vacuum, the Uganda case highlights how the embeddedness of the blend in local communities, and the ways it helps understand and navigate priorities of different stakeholders, play a key role in the success of ongoing projects.*

Relationships between volunteers, partners, primary actors, and other stakeholders were discussed in all interviews and workshops conducted in Uganda, with participants reflecting on both positive accounts and challenges in the relationships. In Tanzania, we found that the recognition of diverse ways of understanding projects, project aims and desired outcomes between all stakeholders is key for projects to be successful, and good working relationships – not just between different types of volunteers, but between volunteers and various stakeholders in the communities they work in, and between these different stakeholders themselves – are essential to the success of VSO projects. The importance of good relationships and the ‘blend’ between different actors, stakeholders and communities was echoed by various participants in Uganda, for example:

*“We should involve locally leaders come out, the beneficiaries and the partners who are giving the support to the community. VSO should go to the community and let the community decide on what they want. If they do like that the project will move successfully.”* (Workshop with national and community volunteers, Nefkens and YEPP, Gulu district)

*“Basically I have more benefit than disadvantages because much as I was, they were learning from me what is locally here, I also learned a lot from them in community activities; that's where I'm also specialised because I'm a health promoter, so I learn also a lot from them as far as the community activities are concerned. [...] What I learned from the partnership as you mentioned [was] because we used to work together. In other words, that togetherness.”* (Interview, Partner, Nefkens, Gulu District)

We also found similarities between Tanzania and Uganda in discussions around challenges in these relationships, for example when a lack of understanding and/or communication between two or more stakeholders occurred:

*“There were communication gaps. Sometimes the way communication is made to you is not so convenient that can make you to reach where you are supposed to go especially for the volunteers as volunteers. The communication gap has not been good to us and it has made us to lag behind in some of the activities which were supposed to do in time.”* (Workshop with community volunteers, YEPP, Gulu district)

*“Some volunteers are also uptight they do not bring the locals to their understanding, for example they do not have the same grounds and understanding points that it leads to clashing of the ideas also.”* (Workshop with primary actors, DYNAMIC, Nefkens and YEPP, Gulu district)

Despite these overarching challenges, the Uganda case study diverges from the Tanzania case study in some notable ways when it comes to understanding relationships between volunteering blends and local communities. Accounts from partners in the field highlight how VSO Uganda actively engages with local leaders, and is considered embedded in local communities to the point of being understood as a community-led organisation:

*“So, VSO has a lot of advantages, and it is really a community-led organisation; whereby it goes down to the grassroots; every person at the grassroots including the youths are really involved and they take part in decision-making. So, VSO is a grassroots-led organisation which captures the interest of the young people.”* (Interview, Partner, A-PLUS, Moroto District)

*“I can say that I greatly appreciate the participatory approach of engaging the district as a partner that VSO took from the very beginning; from the inception of the project into the district and also their flexibility to accept the areas that were proposed as the most needy that required those kind of interventions.”* (Interview, Partner, V4D Health, Napak district)

Furthermore, whereas in Tanzania there was some evidence of 'competition' between development organisations present on the ground, in Uganda VSO was praised for working in difficult to reach communities, that would often go overlooked by other projects and organisations, reinforcing VSO's embeddedness in these communities:

*"...that project [Nefkens], how it was designed, it was basically to go and meet the direct beneficiaries directly, because we used to go to some deep places that many of the partners never reached; and I don't think if they're going to reach because when we talk of ..., when you talk of ..., talk of ..., there's deep places whereby at times you leave your vehicle more than the distance [that] you walk and meet the community deep there. [...] I've seen people walking barefooted so very few of them visit such a place or such places."* (Interview, VSO Partner, Nefkens, Gulu District)

*"VSO works in the most marginalised, the most remote communities. You will not come to say, Uganda, say your placement is in Kampala. You go as deep as Karamoja, you'll go as deep as you know, the border districts of Uganda. That's where marginalisation is at the highest [...] where there's no power, where there's no running water, you understand?"* (Interview, VSO Uganda staff member 3)

Various participants noted working in such marginalised locations caused difficulties for international volunteers in particular, who were not always prepared to work in those circumstances. However, in terms of VSO's wider blend with communities, this approach of targeting overlooked communities has substantial benefits for local buy-in, and as a result, sustainable development outcomes. Another notable difference between Tanzania and Uganda is the approach to the recruitment and selection of primary actors and community volunteers, particularly in projects related to livelihoods. In the livelihoods projects explored in our sample in Uganda, primary actors were overwhelmingly youth/young people, who attended various training courses organised by VSO in the different projects. Many people – notably including the young primary actors themselves – explained that their communities would benefit from expanding the training programmes to older generations, which would have benefits for entire communities, including young people themselves:

*"Yes, to me I think the project was so limited to the youth and you find that they are in the age categories, and certain age category that are very willing to join this program and they are cut off by the age. Like the people in bracket of 31-40, they are really interested people in this programme but they are cut off. Now uh, I mean that if this project was to mix up the youth and some elderly people who would advise, who would act as the mentor to make sure that the togetherness of the youth group is maintained then it would actually be a successful project, yes."* (Interview, Primary actor, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)

*"The project should involve other categories of people like the disabled, child mothers, and other people who are interested in gaining the knowledge. Financial [training] should be made accessible to all the group members. Not only to the youth and the people who are going to get the knowledge from VSO even market vendors, they will need the financial literacy to open up VSLA's and save their income. The age bracket should not be a factor in the next project. As long as you are interested."* (Workshop with primary actors, DYNAMIC, Nefkens and YEPP, Gulu district)

Despite these observations, as well as the challenges raised in section 4.2.2, most of the young primary actors interviewed explained they had benefited greatly from their involvement in the projects, and many reported on the positive impact of projects in helping them start their own small businesses and accessing employment opportunities. This is likely due to VSO's successes in embedding themselves in local communities in Uganda, strengthening findings from Tanzania on the importance of volunteers not only blending with each other but also with the wider communities where they work. This connects to the issue identified above around how external stakeholders perceive who is a volunteer; discourses in Uganda around volunteering and work mean the ways in which modalities and the blend are communicated to communities and stakeholders are particularly important. This further underlines the ways the blended approach can land differently in different places, requiring subtly different work to operationalise it and secure its sustained impacts and added value to the resilience of projects.

### 4.3.3 Resilience and project legacy in communities

*Blended volunteering has the potential to enhance legacy and sustained impacts for development of VSO projects, with the Ugandan case shedding new light on how the wider blend of volunteers with communities and their aspirations can enhance project resilience and lasting outputs.*

Resilience is among the core approaches of VSO's work to "develop communities' ability to identify, prepare for and respond to a range of threats, whilst creating the social, practical and financial safety nets needed to help cushion the impact when disaster does strike" (VSO, n.d.). The Uganda case study illustrates how the aim of strengthening community resilience among primary actors is influenced by the resilience of VSO projects and the benefits of the blended model, which we explore in this section. When it comes to reflecting upon the development outcomes in Uganda, there was a largely positive perception of the sustained impacts from the projects implemented through the blended model:

*"And also under this, there are many changes that they brought into the community. For example, we have financial sustainability, self-dependence. People are able to create their own jobs, start their own life through this training because one is able to know how to move on with a business and all those and as a result an individual is able to live independently." (Workshop with primary actors, DYNAMIC, Nekens and YEPP, Gulu district)*

*"The community has greatly benefited; because all these projects, all these activities that are done by VSO were centred at how best a child can be helped at school, because when you look at violence against children, then you look at issues concerning alternatives to corporal punishment, you look at issues concerning methodologies of teaching; all these are centred on how best to help a child and these children come from the community and [I] am sure the community is happy with the contributions that VSO has made within the school. And above all, from the time VSO came, actually it gave us many ways on how to handle children especially with methodologies the performance improved compared to the rest of the years, so the community is greatly happy with the outcomes that come within the school." (Interview, Primary actor, A-PLUS, Moroto district)*

*"...one example of a guy who was trained in phase one in carpentry and was like a success story because he was trained in carpentry, he was making like deck chairs, and after that he was also training new youth and he employed also because of the training he could sell more." (Interview, International corporate volunteer, DYNAMIC and YEPP, Gulu district)*

This supports our overall findings from Tanzania that showed a particular potential of the blended approach in supporting a sustained legacy at local level. However, in that country case study we also found that around half of the participants had concerns about the longevity and sustained impacts of project impacts when national and international volunteers leave and investments cease. While some participants in Uganda indicated that they would have liked VSO projects to last longer, or be reopened, overall this seemed less of a concern to stakeholders in Uganda. This could be related to the livelihoods focus in Uganda, coupled with the adaptability of national volunteers in the blend contributing to projects' resilience. As discussed earlier, additional factors connected to the resilience and sustainability of projects in the Uganda case study include the role of 'very long-term' volunteers and the VSO's embeddedness at community level, including hard-to-reach localities. A further step in this approach to community engagement involves the recruitment process of community volunteers, particularly in relation to livelihoods projects. We found that on projects in this practice area, community volunteers, or peer educators as they referred to themselves (see also section 4.1.2), were generally young people who had excelled in VSO projects and training courses as primary actors, and were then invited to join projects as community volunteers:

*"...you see, after someone has been trained for let's say five months, and still youth, and he has the interest, or she has the interest, so they will be absorbed there as volunteers." (Interview, International South-South volunteer, DYNAMIC, Gulu district)*

*"... the community, they used to call us youth, because we were once built from the project, we grew up, we gained experience and now we are going back again to teach these fellow youth enrolled into the project. So we would teach them, the different experiences we gained, the different life skills, challenges to overcome, basically entrepreneurship skills was core because we would teach these people how to do saving, how to do record keeping in their different businesses, how to manage, to generally manage businesses, how to draw your business plans. Yeah, those are the things that we could teach them as youth champions volunteering in the community."* (Interview, Community volunteer 2, YEPP, Gulu district)

The approach of recruiting volunteers from existing primary actors, who have first-hand project experience, and are willing to enhance opportunities for others in their own communities, appears to play a key role in further enhancing community buy-in and embeddedness of VSO projects:

*"So it has helped me when teaching others, it has helped me to also pass it on to others yes."* (Interview, Community volunteer 1, YEPP, Gulu district)

*"We have gained knowledge like savings knowledge and knowledge on health, on businesses, then we have had capacity building through learning new things and new skills. We have been exposed to the community. When we go out to teach the community, we learn new things and we teach them also new things, and we get to know each other as VSO and as the community. We are all models to the community most especially the ones that we mentored. We used our examples to motivate them to do businesses, to choose a certain healthy way of living, then they follow our examples."* (Workshop with national and community volunteers, Nefkens and YEPP, Gulu district)

When discussing resilience in volunteering and development settings, attention is needed to avoid the use of the term as a 'label', which calls for situating it in relation to individuals and communities, the types of shocks or adversities they face, and the transformative potential of resilient approaches – rather than simply an emphasis on 'bouncing back' (Cretney, 2014; see also Fadel & Chadwick, 2020). Evidence from the Uganda case study suggests that a combination of factors contributes to the resilience of projects, and of the blended approach within such projects. In particular, the wider blend with local communities, combined with the experience of 'very long-term' volunteer commitments, as well as inclusive approaches for reinforcing local capacities in hard-to-reach locations, are key elements in ensuring resilience is at the heart of the blended volunteering model in Uganda.

#### **4.3.4 Looking forward**

When analysing the data from Tanzania and Uganda on **the conditions that contribute to maximising the impact of diverse volunteering modalities, both as individuals, and as teams**, the findings from both contexts raise several important questions. In particular, the Uganda case study highlights the following question for practitioners:

- ♦ *How can the factors that enhance the resilience and lasting impacts of projects, such as community embeddedness and learning from key stakeholders, be supported through programming in a wide range of contexts to maximise development impacts?*

Finally, the Uganda case also re-affirms the challenges for practitioners that were identified in Tanzania in terms of maximising the development impacts of a blended approach to volunteering:

- ♦ *How can the potential impact of blended volunteering be further increased by more awareness of its 'temporal' dimension, recognising that the blend is fluid throughout a project, and that project stage influences 'the blend'?*
- ♦ *How can a wider understanding of 'blended volunteering', encompassing relationships with primary actors, partners and other stakeholders, contribute to further enhancing shared understanding and shared ownership of a project between all stakeholders?*
- ♦ *How can the insight that factors outside of 'the blend' shape its effectiveness, be incorporated VSO's strategic planning and programming, to ensure that blended volunteering produces sustained impacts for development?*

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

To date, there has been a significant gap in academic and policy literature on how different volunteers interact in their collaborative work with communities. Synergies might improve development outcomes, whereas the risk of friction in group dynamics, such as through power imbalances, could inhibit progress. This is the second of three reports covering the case studies we are undertaking in Tanzania, Uganda and Nepal to understand how blended volunteering, the working together of different volunteering modalities on VSO projects, works in practice.

This report, covering Uganda, is based on the same participatory and qualitative methodologies that we used for our first report covering Tanzania. It prioritises the perspectives of the diverse volunteer types, primary actors, partners and staff who make the VSO blended approach work on the ground. This has enabled us to enhance our understandings of the complexity of the blended volunteering model, as well as its potential to challenge existing norms and practices. It has also highlighted the particular challenges and opportunities the approach presents for project design and management in the volunteer sector. The conclusions we set out below supplement our work for the first report and represent our analysis of the qualitative evidence gathered in Tanzania and Uganda to identify key points from which VSO and other volunteer-engaging development organisations might learn.

### **A. Utilising a bespoke blend of volunteers on a project adds value and, with organisational support, enables adaptability to changing circumstances**

Our report on Tanzania concluded that the utilisation of a blend of volunteers can foster a culture of learning from each other and that these different skillsets nurture a more innovative environment that increases the potential to overcome long-term challenges. The differences between volunteers encourage communication, within the blend and with primary actors, that helps building trust and adaptability, and thus providing a greater likelihood that outcomes will be sustained after the project cycle is completed.

Our work in Uganda not only re-affirms this conclusion, but also found a more widespread conviction that the benefits derived from this approach would be sustained in the longer-term. The data across Tanzania and Uganda highlight the scope of blended volunteering as an international programming approach, and one that the sector more widely can learn from in the context of global uncertainty.

Furthermore, whilst it remains the case that the fluid nature of the blend should be embraced as a fertile ground for innovation and synergy, the liminal space for such creativity needs to be carefully nurtured by volunteer-involving organisations. There was an expectation amongst the volunteers in Uganda for VSO management to specify some parameters and guidance on how different modalities can contribute to the blend. A greater emphasis on blended volunteering in project design, as well as ongoing accompaniment and management of volunteers in the field, may enhance volunteer engagement, the effectiveness of the blend, and ultimately, project outcomes. VSO Uganda actively engages with local leaders, and is considered embedded in local communities to the point of being understood as a community-led organisation. This engagement needs to be balanced, however, against the risk of becoming prescriptive. A key driver of innovation in Uganda, for example, was around the fact that community volunteers were often also benefiting from the projects.

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**B. Rather than necessarily ascribing place-based modalities such as ‘community’ or ‘national’ to volunteers, it is important to focus on their roles, and thus the skills and expertise that each individual can offer to the blend**

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There was a higher level of fluidity across the categories of national and community volunteers in Uganda than we found in Tanzania. We found examples of individual volunteers moving across multiple volunteering modalities over time, as well as working across projects, without necessarily involving an associated change in geographical location. There was also some fluidity across the categories of community volunteer and primary actor, and it was not always clear where the boundaries lay between volunteering for a project or benefiting from/coordinating with it.

Participants in Uganda typically employed the terms ‘peer educators’ or ‘peer mentors’, for example, when referring to community volunteers, and to the professions or specialist area of work (e.g., midwife, corporate experts) rather than ‘national’ or ‘international’ volunteers. Focusing on the skills that individuals can bring to a project rather than potentially hierarchical place-based modalities, helps to break down boundaries and encourages the fluidity required for adaptive management.

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**C. Whilst our report on Tanzania focused on the importance of local knowledge, the adaptability of Ugandan volunteers within the blend is also crucial**

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Our report on Tanzania identified the importance of local knowledge in engaging primary actors in each project. Such knowledge is not just about language translation skills, but also an understanding of local contexts, systems and norms needed to overcome differences in stakeholders’ perceptions or expectations. The volunteers with these skills have a pivotal role in facilitating shared ownership. This remains the case in Uganda as well, where such volunteers had often been primary actors on previous projects and typically engage with each project for longer timeframes.

Nevertheless, our research in Uganda also highlighted how each volunteer within the blend might work together on some aspects, such as planning, before each was deployed on their own to focus on a specific aspect of the project. The challenges related to the deployment of international volunteers to the most marginalised communities means that Ugandan volunteers are actively bridging the gaps in project implementation.

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**D. Such adaptability is dependent on building horizontal relations within the blend of volunteers to encourage empowerment**

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Volunteers that bring expertise from elsewhere, whether those with professional skills or different national and international perspectives, act as a motivation for others to learn and to challenge existing accepted practices. This is due in part to their particular technical experiences as well as their enthusiasm for, and commitment to, collaborating with individuals from different backgrounds when tackling new challenges. Yet, there is a tendency for the discourse around project management to assign terms such as ‘expert’ or ‘specialist’ to these external attributes, whereas local knowledge can be taken for granted and risks becoming an invisible element of the blend.

The Ugandan case also demonstrates the importance of listening and respect within an overarching learning environment in nurturing the relationships between volunteers and partners and/or community actors in the wider blend. This does not mean, however, that such an environment readily exists within every blend. Several participants in Uganda reported a need for closer supervision to make sure that the blended approach was as efficient as it could be – not only to achieve the project’s aims but also to create such enabling environments for volunteers to thrive as a team.

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#### **E. Addressing perceived inequalities to minimise the risk of a power imbalance is dependent on understanding local volunteer economies**

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In Tanzania we found that perceived differences in the financial or other visible benefits available contribute to the risk of a power imbalance that can fuel a perception that primary actors and community volunteers are valued less, in comparison to national or international volunteers in the blend. Similar issues arose in Uganda, both in relation to the compensation system for community volunteers, and where the standard allowance was typically seen by international volunteers as a stipend, whereas national volunteers often regard it as a source of livelihood.

There is a strong association in Uganda between volunteering and work within the country. Volunteering is commonly seen by participants as a career path and thus sense-making around volunteering is often related to livelihood strategies. It creates the risk that international volunteers are perceived as ‘managers’ and national volunteers as ‘staff’, for example, thereby creating organisational hierarchies that lead to a power imbalance.

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#### **F. All participants had a positive experience from working with others**

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As we found in Tanzania, it is important to highlight the positive experiences of participants in Uganda. All volunteering modalities we consulted confirm that they have had positive experiences and learning in working with VSO, and they often attributed this specifically to the blended model that enabled them to work as part of a diverse team. Such experiences are important in overcoming hegemonic perceptions that those in the global South are merely ‘hosts’ to ‘experts’ from the global North.

*This is the second of three case study reports on blended volunteering, based on research in Tanzania, Uganda and Nepal. The analysis and conclusions in this report reflect data, collected in 2021, on the experiences and organisation of blended volunteering in Uganda. Please also consult the other case study reports, as well as our final report, exploring diverse geographies, projects and modalities and further strengthening the body of evidence to support the design, development and programming of blended volunteering in different settings.*

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