

Responsible and Impactful Volunteering Index

Synthesis Report

March 2024



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Acronyms

DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DYC	District Youth Council
GVS	Global Volunteering Standard
JJYC	Jan Jagaran Youth Club
LAFCCOD	Lanao Aquatic and Marine Fisheries Center for Community Development
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MoEYS	Ministry of Education and Youth Services
NVIF	National Volunteer Internship Framework
PSU	Prince Songkla University
R&I	Responsible & Impactful
TSURO	Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation
VfD	Volunteering for Development
VIONET	Volunteer Involving Organisations Network
VMC	Volunteer My Community

Executive Summary

The Responsible & Impactful (R&I) Volunteering Index has been developed by VSO to assess the quality of volunteering practice in VSO-supported project activities. It has been informed by and derived from the Global Volunteering Standard (GVS) developed and launched in 2019, and currently in the process of another round of review.

The R&I Volunteering Index has taken aspects of the GVS and customised these to respond to the context and circumstances of smaller volunteering for development organisations; including their own staff capacity, financial resources and context in which projects are being implemented while also adding additional indices related to community-based volunteering, duty of care, impact measurement. This has also included removing other metrics that are not relevant to smaller volunteer-involving organisations. The four main focus areas of the Index remain aligned with the GVS. These are Project Design and Delivery, Duty of Care, Measuring Impact and Managing Volunteers.

Research design and methodology

The Index was developed and piloted in four countries in 2022. These are Cambodia, Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe. Research Assistants were recruited and trained in the use of the Index tool, and developed a country report for each country, which was synthesized by a Lead Researcher to produce a synthesis report. This report included recommendations of how the research processes could be further strengthened, and the tool was revised accordingly.

In 2023, two additional countries were added to the study, being Philippines and Thailand. The Index Tool was developed to measure the quality of volunteering practice longitudinally, where the same partners would be assessed for subsequent years to establish the extent of change that has happened in subsequent years. There have been two changes in the second year of assessment, where VSO Zimbabwe is no longer working with one of the partners, and so an alternative organisation was assessed in 2023. There was also a change in the focus of the assessment in Malawi, in line with the validation of a long-awaited volunteering and internship policy which will have implications for volunteering, and youth volunteering in particular, at community level.

The change in partners and in research assistants in Nepal and Zimbabwe have potential to have influenced scoring, contributing to high levels of variance in Nepal. These disparities should be explored further to establish the reasons for the decline and necessary support provided. The diverse nature of the projects being assessed may influence comparability of results given the size and scale of large government-funded programmes in Malawi and Cambodia, as compared to small projects such as Philippines where the high scores may have been influenced by some bias of the researcher. The sampling criteria should be considered further.

Learning partnership

Since piloting in year 1, VSO has successfully established a learning partnership with Thammasat University who have led on the production of the synthesis report. The MoU between Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies (PSDS), Thammasat University and VSO since 2019 signifies the joint aspirations to develop a strategic alliance to promote volunteering for development in Thailand.

This joint synthesis report was authored by Assistant Professor Kedkun Srakawee and Assistant Professor Weeraboon Wisartsakul located within the Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies, Thammasat University, Thailand.

Results

The Index Assessment for 2023, finds improvements in three of four countries that participated in the first year of the study, with a small decline in scores in Nepal for Duty of Care, and a larger decline in scores for Managing Volunteers. The specific reasons for this will need to be established and support provided to ensure progress in this area in 2024. There were significant improvements in Measuring Impact in Nepal and by VIONET, one of the two partners assessed in Zimbabwe.

Project Design and Delivery achieved varying scores across partners, in part influenced by the nature of projects that are being implemented, and how volunteers are engaged. Through annual action plans and consultation workshops, the VMC engaged with NGOs, development partners, and local stakeholders to gather insights and reflections, facilitating collaborative decision-making. The assessment finds that significant efforts were made to ensure community participation, but this can be further strengthened. In Malawi, community engagement in project design was robust, supported by comprehensive steps taken by the office responsible for Youth Development and adherence to the National Youth Policy. Community members are primary actors are engaged in project design and there has been significant effort to ensure impact is measured on a regular basis, though there is room to increase community participation in routine monitoring. In Thailand, there was a limited involvement of primary actors and community volunteers in project planning. However, following recruitment, volunteers actively contribute to both the design and implementation phases.

In Philippines, the project fosters an enabling environment where volunteers and primary actors feel valued and empowered, contributing to their meaningful engagement and ownership in implementation decisions.

The majority of partners have not made significant strides in addressing issues related to climate mitigation and carbon footprint. This is in part a resourcing issue, and in some countries, no air travel is taking place, necessitating the need to measure carbon footprint.

VIONET scores average on this pillar. The organisation demonstrates strong commitment to community participation and engagement. An enabling environment was fostered where volunteers felt like equal actors alongside staff and partners, there were issues such as the lack of differentiation between staff and volunteers and challenges in evaluation planning and implementation.

Duty of Care scores continue to be low across the majority of countries. This is in part due to the nature of the organisations assessed, and how volunteers are engaged. In large-scale government programmes such as VMC in Cambodia and in Malawi, volunteering has a strong community development focus, but is not primary-actor led. In both examples, the focus is on youth development and employability, and less so on the individuals being reached. This has contributed to low levels of awareness and limited systems/processes to ensure duty of care. Similarly, an organisation such as VIONET is an advocacy and coordination network and has less interaction with primary actors. This may likely partly explain why it scores low on duty of care.

Measuring Impact

Scores for Measuring Impact are generally high across all projects/organisations that were assessed for this year. There has been substantive improvement in scores for this aspect in Nepal, and with VIONET in Zimbabwe. Both these organisations were assessed in year 1, confirming that making them aware of this gap, alongside additional capacity-building has contributed to improvements in this area. Most organisations have some version of a log frame or a MEL plan in place, and are collecting baseline metrics. In Thailand, progress has been made towards developing log frames, indicators and a MEL plan but these have not been concluded, and while there are plans to train staff and volunteers in participatory monitoring, this has not been fully implemented. While these scores are high, the limited involvement of primary actors in participatory monitoring remains a concern in some countries. Countries where there is a strong evaluation and learning focus include Nepal, Thailand and Philippines. These high scores for Philippines are due to the project being assessed being part of the ACTIVE grant received by VSO Philippines, and the grant itself has a strong MEL focus.

Managing Volunteers

This pillar was assessed across five of the six countries included in the assessment. Given the structure of the youth offices in Malawi, it was deemed that this pillar was not applicable, and has thus not been scored for Malawi. As the partner being assessed has changed since the first year of implementation, there is also no basis for comparison.

JJYC, has scored at an average level in this pillar. There are a range of processes and procedures related to recruitment, role descriptions, oversight but the project is lacking in exit procedures and performance reviews for volunteers.

Strong administrative systems and processes within the VMC Programme in Cambodia, accompanied by comprehensive induction, ongoing planning and communication have contributed to strong performance in this pillar. Areas that require attention are also the absence of performance reviews and clear planning as to how young people can continue to work with and empower the communities where they are implementing projects. Given the scale of the programme, it is crucial that the administrative and management systems are working effectively to ensure smooth implementation, and that the overall programme is meeting its intended objectives of promoting skills development, social awareness and employability of participating young people.

The score for this metric is highest among PSU in Thailand and Philippines where a range of mechanisms exist for the recruitment, placement, performance management and debrief of volunteers at the end of their placement. There are clear remuneration guidelines in place with no differentiation between national and community volunteers.

VIONET scores average on this metric. While it has a range of policies and systems in place, these are not universally applied or documented. Volunteers receive appropriate training and collaborate on structured work plans but lack a predetermined frequency for performance reviews. Post-placement debriefs capture personal development but are inconsistently documented.

Recommendations and Conclusions

PSDS at Thammasat University has developed a set of recommendations for each respective pillar as informed by the scoring and identified gaps, and recommendations related to the research design and methodology.

The recommendations that relate to the respective scores for each pillar. High level recommendations for each pillar are documented below.

Pillar 1: Design and delivery

- **Community Engagement:** Ensure active participation of primary actors and community volunteers in project design and planning processes to incorporate diverse perspectives and enhance project relevance and sustainability.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Differentiate between staff and volunteer responsibilities and tasks clearly, and ensure equitable remuneration, benefits, and recognition to foster an inclusive environment and avoid disparities.
- **Project Alignment and Integration:** Align project design and planning with national policies and guiding principles to ensure consistency, sustainability, and effectiveness in achieving development objectives.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Ensure consistent sharing of evaluation findings and recommendations with primary actors and partners to enhance accountability, transparency, and learning from project outcomes.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Continuously review and enhance project design and planning processes to address identified gaps, build upon strengths, and maximize impact and effectiveness.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

- **Documentation and Policies:** - Ensure thorough documentation of safety and security guidelines, safeguarding policies, and procedures to align with legislation and provide clear guidance to volunteers and staff.
- **Training and Awareness:**- Provide comprehensive training on policies, guidelines, and safeguarding procedures to volunteers and staff to ensure their understanding and adherence.
- **Risk Management:** Implement effective risk management strategies, including risk assessments, mitigation plans, and communication channels, to address safety and security risks and ensure the well-being of volunteers and staff.
- **Safeguarding Policies and Procedures:** Develop and enforce clear safeguarding policies and procedures, including reporting mechanisms, defined roles, and resources, to prevent and respond to abuse effectively.
- **Community Involvement and Communication:** Involve communities in identifying and reporting risks, ensure clear communication of potential risks to volunteers, and provide accessible materials to enhance awareness and understanding of safeguarding practices.
- **Recruitment Practices:** Implement safe recruitment practices, including background checks, code of conduct adherence, and training, to ensure the suitability and safety of volunteers.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

Below are the summaries of the recommendations grouped by the issue of measuring impact:

- **Establishment of Baselines and Metrics:** Ensure the establishment of baselines for measuring project results and conduct pre- and post-project training reports to assess impacts.
- **Development of Change Indicators:** Collaborate with primary stakeholders to develop robust change indicators aligned with project goals.
- **Inclusive Data Collection and Monitoring:** Implement systems for community and stakeholder participation in data collection and routine monitoring to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide comprehensive training on participatory monitoring processes to staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to enhance impact evaluation.
- **Community Involvement:** Ensure active involvement of marginalized and vulnerable individuals in monitoring and validating project data.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

- **Volunteer Grievance Resolution:** Ensure timely resolution of volunteer grievances to uphold organizational effectiveness.
- **Volunteer Debriefs and Performance Reviews:** Establish formalized processes for volunteer debriefs and performance reviews to enhance volunteer support and evaluation. Formalize debriefing processes to effectively support volunteers' personal development and future aims.
- **Documented Policies and Procedures:** Develop documented volunteer recruitment policies and procedures to ensure transparency and consistency. Strengthen the implementation of documented recruitment policies to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer selection.
- **Training and Orientation:** Provide comprehensive training and support to volunteers, including orientation on organizational policies and cultural norms.
- **Standardization in Recruitment:** Establish clear job descriptions and standardized selection processes to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer recruitment. Formalize recruitment processes to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer selection.
- **Performance Evaluation and Development:** Implement structured performance evaluation mechanisms and post-placement debriefs to support volunteer effectiveness and development. Establish consistent procedures for performance reviews and documentation of post-placement debriefs to support volunteer development effectively. Develop a structured debriefing process post-placement to capture valuable insights for future programme improvement and volunteer development.

Recommendations that relate to the research methodology are outlined below.

- Cross-country assessments may not accurately reflect equal comparisons because each country and each project may have different analyzing units, such as organizational units, community units, or sub-project units. Additionally, each country may have different networks, resources, and funding support for projects. Therefore, comparing projects at other times or with similar analyzing units can provide more precise assessment results and contribute to more effective project development.

Introduction

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

VSO has developed a learning partnership with Thammasat University who have led on the production of the synthesis report. The MoU between Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies (PSDS), Thammasat University and VSO since 2019 signifies the joint aspirations to develop a strategic alliance to promote volunteering for development in Thailand. Both organisations collaborate to strengthen academic capacity in PSDS's syllabus on volunteer management as well as practical learning for students regarding volunteering for development, especially under Voice of Youth project during 2020 – 2022 which we partnered to strengthen local youth CSOs to undertake effective youth-led development and governance in their communities.

This year 2023, PSDS has agreed to become the learning partner for the Responsible and Impactful Volunteering Index. Their commitment to academic excellence and depth of knowledge have enriched the content of this paper, underscoring the enduring partnership we share. This collaborative effort not only showcases the synergistic relationship between our institutions but also amplifies our shared dedication to advancing knowledge and practice in volunteering for development.

The synthesis report includes a description of findings for each country, cross-country observations and recommendations for each pillar, as well as recommendations related to the design and methodology of the study.

Methodology

Research Design

The Responsible & Impactful Volunteering Index has been developed to contextualise elements of the Global Volunteering Standard, and is focussed on smaller community-based organisations and networks. It has added additional elements which consider dimensions of community volunteering, recruitment and measuring impact, and removed others which were deemed less relevant to community-based organisations and networks. Elements of the Global Volunteering Standard are also out of reach for smaller organisations, and addressing these rely on having access to financial and human resources which is not always possible.

VSO has developed the tool with a Likert scale which allows research assistants to measure the project on a continuum of performance and to provide related documentation that substantiate the assessment score. The intention is that the Index is implemented in a

longitudinal manner, allowing for comparison and assessment of progress year-on-year, with new countries being added each year.

To achieve this vision of creating a contextualised Assessment, the R&I Index was initially administered in four countries in 2022: **Cambodia, Malawi, Nepal and Zimbabwe**. Four research assistants or teams familiar with VSO and volunteering for Development (VfD) and based in the participating countries documented the implementation of the Index, prepared a scalar table (based on globally prescribed indices) against each indicator, and synthesised information to produce a country report. The country reports allow VSO to identify themes and patterns that will inform capacity-building activities with partner organisations over the next twelve months:

Subsequent to completing the first year of assessment, VSO revised the Index based on feedback from researchers. This included removing questions and adjusting the scale for some focus areas.

The second year of implementation has entailed the addition of two new countries: **Philippines and Thailand**, alongside the continued assessment of the four countries. The projects that were assessed have changed in both Malawi and Zimbabwe, due to a change in focus of programming at country level, and a change in partners in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe had assessed two projects in year 1. One of the projects is included in year 2, and the second includes a new partner.

A similar analysis and report-writing process has been followed for year 2, whereby country reports were prepared, and an overall synthesis report has been developed by two Assistant Professors at Thammasat University in Thailand, the identified learning partner for the study. These are Assistant Professor Kedkun Srakawee and Assistant Professor Weeraboon Wisartsakul located within the Puey Ungphakorn School of Development Studies. The researchers have also been able to make recommendations related to the design of the study, and for each of the pillars assessed in the Index.

The findings of the study will be jointly presented and published by VSO, together with Thammasat University.

Sample of Assessed Organisations

Thailand: The PSU Volunteer Centre is an organization under the Prince of Songkla University (PSU) that supports students, staff, and graduates to possess the characteristics of 'good people with professional volunteering skills for society.' This is a crucial role of the Volunteer Center for Community, Prince of Songkla University, aiming to enhance the capabilities of its personnel to coordinate collaboration networks across all five campuses to become a quality team (Coaching Team) for developing the volunteer system. This team includes volunteer graduates, student affairs officers, representatives from the community sector, faculty members or volunteer experts, and community leaders.

Nepal: Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC), an NGO that works nationwide, lead and managed by youth committed to development. Currently, VSO Nepal has a partnership with JJYC for the education-related activities under the education component of the ACTIVE project, for which it has mobilised community volunteers.

Cambodia: The Volunteer for My Community Programme (VMC) is Cambodia's largest national volunteering and community outreach initiative, managed by the Department of Youth Centre (DYC). Aligned with Cambodia's National Policy on Youth Development, National Action Plan for Youth Development, and Sustainable Development Goals, VMC aims to fulfill the government's vision of "one youth, one skill" by enlisting volunteers from diverse backgrounds nationwide. These volunteers undergo training to identify community issues and devise projects to tackle them. Supported by various stakeholders including government bodies, NGOs, and community members, VMC endeavours to create significant grassroots-level impact through collaborative efforts and skill enhancement initiatives.

Malawi: In Malawi two organisations were selected to be assessed. The first is **Mzuzu-NVIF** (the National Volunteer and Internship Framework). The second is **Salima-NVIF** (the National Volunteer and Internship Framework). The inclusion of District Youth Offices (DYO) in Mzuzu City and Salima District reflects a deliberate effort to target offices with a significant youth presence, ensuring that the study captures perspectives relevant to the youth demographic. The recent validation of the National Volunteering and Internship Framework has been instrumental in guiding the selection process, aligning offices and organizations with national volunteering priorities and objectives.

Philippines: The **ACTIVE** project in the Philippines, spanning three provinces, focuses on resilient livelihoods, climate resilience, and peace-building with partners UnYPhil-Women and LAFCCOD. It emphasizes empowering individuals to establish connections for active citizenship and social accountability. Current efforts aim to bolster resilience and peace in the Bangsamoro Region by integrating agroecology and peace-building within a Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) sub-camp, aligning with the community's quest for self-determination. Agroecology empowers diverse groups, including former combatants and marginalized individuals, by granting them agency over sustainable livelihoods.

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

- The first is **VIONET**, a network of VIOs coming together to share their community of practice in their different thematic groups. VIONET is made up of different community-based volunteer groups and community-based organisations working on different Sustainable Development Goals. VIONET is a Volunteer Organization, coordinates volunteer activities, advocates for volunteer rights, and provides support for placement and welfare, emphasizing volunteer management through coordination centres and leadership consultancy; aiming to address barriers and establish income-generating activities like ISALs, the organization focuses on grassroots involvement, promotes volunteer policies, and advocates for a national volunteering strategy, encountering resistance from larger organizations.
- The second is **Towards Sustainable Use of Resources Organisation (TSURO)** TSURO focuses on sustainable agriculture, particularly agroecology, to safeguard the environment and promote community-based seed systems, along with economic growth and holistic land and livestock management in 16 wards for peaceful communities. Collaboration with stakeholders includes Sexual Reproductive Health Rights champions and seed study groups, while youth play a vital role in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans. Additionally, youth film screening facilitators share films on climate change and migration, and training sessions cover topics like WASH and mental health. Economic strengthening involves

marketing farm produce and providing business skills training. Support departments like M&E and Finance are integral, and community engagement includes resident training in team building. Student interns are engaged through application and interview processes, some without pay for fulfilling academic requirements.

Limitations

Change in partners: In both Zimbabwe and Malawi, the projects that were assessed in year 1 differ from year 2. This means it is not possible to measure longitudinal change in the same partners. The Index does provide an overall assessment of the state of volunteering practice by key VSO partners. In both Zimbabwe and Malawi, the projects assessed include volunteer networks, which are a major partner for VSO both in implementation, policy and advocacy work, including efforts related to the Global Volunteering Standard (GVS).

Nature of assessed project: Countries that have been selected to participate in the first two years of the Responsible & Impactful Volunteering Index study have received training in the Global Volunteering Standard. Additionally, training has been conducted with in-country partners. These range from CBOs to VIO networks to government agencies with different mandates – making comparison across the assessed projects difficult.

Change in Index Researchers: Two of the four countries assessed in year one had to recruit new researchers as volunteers ended their placements. This may have affected the scoring of these projects as new volunteers will not have a historical understanding of the partner.

Country Results

1. NEPAL

Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC): An NGO that works nationwide, lead and managed by youth committed to development. Currently, VSO Nepal has a partnership with JJYC for the education-related activities under the education component of the ACTIVE project, for which it has mobilised community volunteers.

Pillar 1: Design and Delivering projects

The overall performance of the assessed organisation on designing and planning is 71%, suggesting some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The project demonstrates commendable efforts in incorporating community participation and input into project design and implementation decisions, as evidenced by various reports and consultation processes. However, there are areas requiring attention, such as ensuring clear differentiation between staff and volunteer responsibilities and tasks, and the consistent sharing of evaluation findings and recommendations with primary actors and partners, particularly in volunteer-led projects. While there are positive aspects, such as inclusive decision-making processes and active involvement of primary actors in monitoring and review activities, addressing these identified gaps will be essential to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the project outcomes.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of the assessment programme and its partner organisations regarding duty of care is 72% and requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards.

Various indicators were assessed within this pillar, reflecting both strengths and areas for improvement. Safety and security guidelines have been jointly developed by VSO and partner organizations, yet there are partial documentation and training gaps observed, underscoring the need for comprehensive risk management strategies. Volunteers' pre-placement training incorporates up-to-date risk assessments and consent procedures, yet gaps exist in refresher training provisions. While safeguarding policies are documented, there are gaps in adherence and communication, highlighting the necessity for consistent training and dissemination efforts. Efforts to prohibit volunteer engagement in certain contexts, such as orphanages, demonstrate commitment to safeguarding, but further clarity is required. Safe recruitment practices are evident, but the implementation of mitigation systems to safeguard volunteers' health and well-being lacks refresher training provisions. Overall, addressing these areas will strengthen the duty of care framework and ensure robust support for volunteers throughout their placements.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The assessed organisations overall performance in measuring impact meets the standards at 91%, indicating a satisfactory result with only minor room for improvement to meet the standard fully.

This result reveals commendable adherence to standards, with an overall score of 91%. Across various indicators, significant strides have been made towards effectively measuring and evaluating the impact of the project on marginalized and vulnerable populations. The collaboration between VSO and its partners in developing a set of change indicators demonstrates a robust framework for tracking progress throughout the project lifecycle. While there are areas for improvement in establishing systems for community involvement in monitoring data collection, comprehensive training provided to project staff and volunteers ensures inclusive processes for data collection and evaluation. Documented evidence illustrates active participation from marginalized and vulnerable individuals in monitoring and validating project data, underscoring the project's commitment to inclusivity. Moreover, the evaluation process, including case studies and community feedback, effectively measures the collective contributions of volunteers to positive changes in the lives of beneficiaries. Regular progress and end reports, supplemented by verbal presentations during workshops, further validate and adapt project results based on feedback from marginalized and vulnerable communities, ensuring transparency and accountability in the project's impact assessment efforts. Overall, the programme demonstrates a robust framework for measuring impact, with ongoing efforts to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness in evaluating project outcomes.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the assessed organisation in managing volunteers is 70%, suggesting some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The organization has established transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment policies and processes, supported by documented guidelines and frameworks. Volunteers' applications are screened against role descriptions, and selection criteria are applied uniformly, with clear communication provided to all candidates. Moreover, volunteers receive relevant training about their placement, including information on social and cultural norms and financial considerations. However, there are areas for enhancement, such as the lack of established processes for volunteer debriefs and inconsistencies in conducting performance reviews due to the absence of agreed-upon frequency. Addressing these areas will contribute to strengthening volunteer management practices and optimizing volunteer contributions towards organizational goals.

Summary

Table 1 : Assessment summary for Nepal-JJYC

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and delivery	71%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards.
2) Duty of Care	72%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards.
3) Measuring Impact	91%	Most recommended requirements are met.
4) Managing Volunteers	70%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards.

The project's performance in designing and planning, assessed at 71%, shows efforts in involving the community in decision-making but needs improvement in clarifying responsibilities and sharing evaluation findings. The duty of care pillar scores 72%, indicating the need for enhancements in safety guidelines, training, and communication regarding safeguarding policies. Measuring impact achieves a commendable 91%, with solid collaboration and inclusive data collection processes, ensuring transparency and accountability in evaluating project outcomes.

Managing volunteers scores 70%, indicating transparent recruitment processes but highlighting the need for structured debriefs and performance reviews to optimize volunteer contributions. Overall, while each pillar has positive aspects, addressing identified gaps is crucial for enhancing project effectiveness and sustainability.

2. CAMBODIA

The Volunteer for My Community Programme (VMC) is the largest national initiative for volunteering and community outreach in Cambodia under the Department of Youth Centre (DYC). Established in accordance with the National Policy on Cambodian Youth Development 2011, the National Action Plan for Cambodian Youth Development, and the Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals, VMC operates within the framework of the government's vision for "one youth, one skill". VMC recruits volunteers from diverse backgrounds across the country, providing them with training to identify community issues and develop specific projects aimed

at addressing them. With technical and financial support from the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports (MoEYS), Department of Education, Youth, and Sports (DoEYS), local authorities, NGOs, private sector, and community members, VMC endeavors to make a tangible difference at the grassroots level. The programme has three main objectives:

- Enhancing the capacity of young volunteers in soft skills, technical skills, and technology, both within and outside of educational settings. This is achieved through hands-on learning, project design, and implementation aimed at supporting community development.
- Contributing to community development by raising awareness and facilitating the construction of essential infrastructure through collaboration with community members, relevant institutions, and development partners. VMC also seeks to promote the benefits of youth volunteering within communities.
- Improving the effectiveness of national-level officials and the Department of Education, Youth, and Sports in coordinating volunteerism among young people. This involves implementing standardized and contemporary work systems utilizing information technology to support and coordinate volunteer efforts effectively.

Pillar 1: Design and delivering projects

The overall performance of the assessed project regarding designing and planning is 79%, which suggests some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

Pillar 1 of the project emphasized the importance of community participation in designing and planning activities, ensuring that the voices and inputs of target communities were incorporated into the project scale and outcomes. Through annual action plans and consultation workshops, the VMC engaged with NGOs, development partners, and local stakeholders to gather insights and reflections, facilitating collaborative decision-making.

Although some challenges were encountered, such as limited involvement of primary actors and resistance from certain community members, evidence from project proposals and learning documents underscored the commitment to inclusive planning processes. Moreover, despite resource constraints, the project benefitted from support provided by relevant stakeholders and external partners, enabling informed project design and implementation. Moving forward, continued efforts to enhance community engagement and address implementation challenges will be essential for achieving sustainable development outcomes and fostering meaningful participation among marginalized and vulnerable groups.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance in the duty of care stands at 40%, requiring significant improvements to meet recommended standards.

The duty of care performance shows several indicators which require attention in the programme's safeguarding practices. While Safety and Security guidelines were developed by VSO and partners, the documentation and implementation of these policies were incomplete, with limited training provided to volunteers. Despite the lack of a clear safeguarding policy, risk assessments were conducted periodically, albeit without formal documentation, and volunteers were trained on safety measures. However, there was a lack of clarity regarding reporting mechanisms for safeguarding concerns. Additionally, the programme's commitment to child

protection lacked structured measures and resources, although progress was made in identifying support systems. Safeguarding policies and materials were not readily accessible to staff and volunteers, and training on safeguarding was inconsistent. Recruitment processes included background checks, but there were gaps in the provision of mandatory safeguarding training for both staff and volunteers. Moreover, while a Code of Conduct was in place, understanding and adherence varied, indicating the need for ongoing training and reinforcement. Overall, concerted efforts are required to strengthen the program's duty of care framework and ensure the safety and well-being of all stakeholders involved.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the assessed programme regarding measuring impact meets the standards at 76%. suggests some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The overall performance of the assessed programme regarding measuring impact meets the standards at 76%, indicating a satisfactory level of achievement. However, there are areas identified for improvement to meet the recommended standards.

Firstly, while VSO and partners developed change indicators to measure progress throughout the project and established baselines for measurement, there were inconsistencies in the utilization of the evaluation framework due to human resource constraints within the Volunteer Management Committee (VMC). Furthermore, training on primary actor-inclusive processes for data collection, monitoring, and evaluation was not adequately provided to project staff and volunteers, impacting the implementation of impact evaluation. Additionally, although there is partial evidence of marginalized and vulnerable people's participation in the monitoring and validation of project data, challenges such as limited human resources and financial constraints have hindered the full development of the project monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan (MEL). Nonetheless, project progress and end reports have demonstrated validation and modifications of project results based on feedback from marginalized communities, albeit with limitations in proper documentation and reporting formats. Moving forward, addressing these identified areas for improvement will be crucial in enhancing the programme's ability to measure its impact effectively and meet recommended standards.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the assessment programme regarding managing volunteers at 80% is quite good and requires only select improvements to meet the recommended standards. The mandate has been established that promotes volunteerism. The indicators demonstrate the organization's commitment to transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment policies and processes. Documented guidelines and frameworks ensure consistency and clarity in screening, selection, and communication with candidates. Volunteers receive comprehensive training and orientation, although there are areas for improvement, such as informing volunteers about financial costs associated with their placement. The organization effectively orients partners on volunteer management, aligning expectations and sharing relevant guidelines. Volunteers' performance is supported through induction, training, and accompaniment, contributing to their success in their roles. However, there is room for enhancing performance evaluation mechanisms and implementing formalized debriefs to further support volunteers' personal development and their future aims for assisting marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Summary

Table 2: Assessment summary for Cambodia (VMC)

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	79%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	40%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	76%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	80%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards and most recommended requirements are met

The Volunteer for My Community (VMC) programme in Cambodia, spearheaded by the Department of Youth Centre, aims to bolster youth volunteering and community development through diverse volunteer recruitment and training. Supported by multiple stakeholders, the programme targets skill enhancement, community development, and better official coordination. Assessments across four pillars reveal areas for improvement: firstly, in designing and planning, where community involvement needs enhancement; secondly, in ensuring better-safeguarding practices and consistent training under the duty of care; thirdly, in refining data collection and community participation for measuring impact; and finally, in optimizing volunteer management practices, particularly in performance evaluation and debriefing. These challenges are due to the structure of the programme being of such large scale, with limited touch points between individual volunteers and the DoEYS in relation to duty of care, well-being, measuring impact and volunteer planning and exit. Despite these challenges, the programme holds promise but requires enhancements to achieve more practical goals.

3. MALAWI

The Malawi Ministry of Labour has introduced the National Volunteering and Internship Framework (NVIF), as a mechanism to ensure beneficial youth engagement. Under the Ministry of Youth, District Youth Offices serve as central hubs for coordinating and supporting volunteer endeavours, fostering a sense of community responsibility for youth well-being and advancement. These offices play a vital role in coordinating the youth development subsector, setting agendas, developing programmes, gathering evidence, monitoring and evaluation. Their initiatives align with pillars outlined in the National Youth Policy, engaging youth volunteers in various activities aimed at supporting youth development, including outreach events, social media campaigns, and community partnerships.

The inclusion of District Youth Offices (DYO) in Mzuzu City and Salima District in the Index Study reflects a deliberate effort to target offices with a significant youth presence, ensuring that the study captures perspectives relevant to the youth demographic. The recent validation of the NVIF has been instrumental in guiding the selection process, aligning offices and organizations with national volunteering priorities and objectives.

The Department of Youth administers youth development services nationwide through 32 District Youth Offices, delivering services through community-level structures such as Youth

Technical Subcommittees (YTSCs), Youth Networks, Youth Action Committees (YACs), Youth Clubs, Youth offices, and Youth Associations. The department's functions include coordinating the youth development subsector, setting agendas, developing programmes, gathering evidence, mobilizing resources, and providing comprehensive reporting, all guided by the pillars outlined in the National Youth Policy.

MALAWI – Mzuzu City Youth Office

Pillar 1: Design and delivery

The overall performance of the Mzuzu Youth Office in designing and planning is 79%, suggesting some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The assessment of various indicators under this pillar highlighted significant achievements and areas for enhancement. Notably, community engagement in project design was robust, supported by comprehensive steps taken by the office responsible for Youth Development and adherence to the National Youth Policy. However, gaps were observed in carbon footprint measurement, and ensuring an inclusive environment for volunteers and marginalized primary actors. Strengthening outcome evaluation planning, dissemination of findings, and active involvement of primary actors in monitoring processes are recommended to enhance future project effectiveness and sustainability.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance in the duty of care pillar stands at 35% and requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standards.

Overall performance of 35% indicates significant room for improvement to align with recommended standards across various indicators. Firstly, while Safety and Security guidelines have been developed to protect marginalized individuals, gaps exist in volunteer training due to funding constraints and limited communication on potential risks. Secondly, pre-placement risk assessments and consent procedures lack effectiveness, with volunteers failing to provide written consent and communities inadequately informed about reporting protocols. Thirdly, while safeguarding policies are documented, volunteers lack training and awareness, revealing gaps in induction processes. Fourthly, public display and accessibility of safeguarding materials at the community level are lacking, hindering understanding and awareness among volunteers. Fifthly, organizational commitment to child protection lacks defined roles and precise reporting mechanisms despite legislative frameworks in place.

Additionally, the organization prohibits volunteers from working with orphanages but lacks clear safeguarding protocols and risk assessments. Safe recruitment practices, including background checks, are implemented but lack the involvement of last-line managers. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive code of conduct and volunteer training regarding safeguarding and prevention exacerbates gaps in induction and recruitment processes. Lastly, no mitigation systems are in place to address potential impacts on volunteers' health and well-being. This is in part due to the fact that these young people themselves come from their own communities and are not placed within youth offices as a formal placement with fixed timelines. Addressing these gaps is crucial to enhance the duty of care framework and ensure the safety and well-being of volunteers and community members involved in youth development activities.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of Mzuzu Youth Office in measuring impact meets the standards at 68% and requires only some improvements to meet the recommended standards.

Firstly, in the indicator concerning the development of change indicators to measure progress, VSO and partners collaborated with primary stakeholders to establish baseline metrics aligned with Malawi's 2063 goals. While systems for community involvement in data collection were comprehensive, the indicator regarding training for project staff and volunteers on participatory monitoring processes was not met, and no sessions were conducted as planned. Although the logical framework for the project and partial development of the monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan were in place, interns and volunteers lacked training for effective monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, while community members and volunteers documented and shared project results, there was a gap in formal evaluations measuring volunteers' contributions to impacting marginalized and vulnerable individuals. Lastly, project progress reports provided regular updates to communities and stakeholders, facilitating oral communication through various channels, but lacked documentation on how feedback influenced project modifications.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

As Mzuzu Youth Office does not undertake recruitment of volunteers, and nor are youth formally contracted, it was deemed that assessing this pillar was not applicable.

Summary

Table 3: Assessment Summary for Malawi – Mzuzu

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	79%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	35%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	68%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	N/A	

The District Youth Offices (DYO) in Mzuzu City, reveals a mixed performance across Pillars 1 to 4. In Pillar 1: Design and Delivery, the programme demonstrates commendable performance at 79%, with robust community engagement and adherence to national policies. However, gaps in outcome evaluations and inclusivity for volunteers and marginalized actors need to be addressed. Pillar 2: Duty of Care exhibits significant room for improvement at 38%, particularly in volunteer training, risk assessment procedures, and safeguarding protocols. Pillar 3: Measuring Impact meets standards at 68%, with notable collaboration in establishing baseline metrics, yet challenges persist in staff and volunteer training for effective monitoring and evaluation.

MALAWI – Salima District Youth Office

Salima District Youth Office: Much like the Mzuzu counterpart, the Salima District Youth Office places strong emphasis on community engagement, actively involving key stakeholders in project design and planning. Programming is informed by learning and evidence documents such as those derived from the National Youth Policy. The office prioritizes equipping youth with essential skills for community development, peace-building, and sustainable livelihoods, facilitated by the supportive district structures that encourage youth participation and agency. The commitment of various offices is evident in Salima through capacity-building training provided to youth and volunteers within youth networks.

Notably, the National Youth Service programme plays a significant role in nurturing youth character, leadership, and social capital, empowering them for community development. However, akin to Mzuzu, there is a lack of measurement for the carbon footprint resulting from project-related travel.

Salima maintains a clear distinction between interns and volunteers. Interns have defined roles and receive monthly upkeep and field allowances, while volunteers do not receive upkeep but may benefit from training and materials, with both groups emphasizing experience as a shared benefit. In terms of monitoring and evaluation, primary actors in Salima, including interns, gather data from the project's inception stage. However, community volunteers, constrained by distance and financial limitations, are only sporadically involved in reviews. Evaluation findings are quarterly shared at District Executive Committees, with the office ensuring the implementation of recommendations through follow-up measures.

Pillar 1: Design and delivering projects

The overall performance of the assessed organisation in design and planning is 87%, suggesting only some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The assessment of Pillar 1: Designing and Delivering Projects indicates that the organisation has performed well, achieving an overall score of 87%. This confirms that the programme has established strong foundations in designing and planning its interventions. Community members actively participated in the project design process, ensuring that their voices and inputs were incorporated into the planning phase. The utilization of various community structures and the inclusion of primary actors, particularly youth, underscored the participatory nature of community activities. Furthermore, alignment with national policies and its commitment to sustainability was evident by the integration of guiding principles outlined in the National Youth Policy. However, there are areas for improvement, such as addressing disparities in responsibilities, tasks, remuneration, and benefits among staff, interns, and community volunteers. Additionally, enhancing the engagement of primary actors in project evaluations and decision-making processes could further strengthen effectiveness and inclusivity. While Salima youth development activities have demonstrated commendable efforts in designing and planning its interventions, continued attention to these areas will be essential for achieving optimal outcomes and maximizing impact.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance in the duty of care stands at 32%, suggesting significant improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards.

The assessment of the duty of care pillar reveals a concerning result of 32%, indicating a substantial gap in meeting the recommended standards. Several critical indicators underscore this deficiency. Firstly, while the office has developed safety and security policies and guidelines, there are evident gaps in communication of potential risks to volunteers. Moreover, interns and volunteers lack comprehensive training on safeguarding policies and procedures, reflecting a significant oversight in ensuring their awareness and adherence to critical protocols. Additionally, there is a lack of public availability and display of safeguarding materials at the community level, further exacerbating the accessibility and understanding of key guidelines among marginalized and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the absence of mitigation systems to safeguard volunteers' health and well-being highlights a critical oversight in addressing potential risks and ensuring adequate support mechanisms. Overall, urgent and comprehensive improvements are imperative to enhance the duty of care framework and effectively safeguard the well-being of staff and volunteers involved in the NVIF activities in the respective counties.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the assessed project regarding measuring impact is **59% and requires some improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

In the area of impact, the assessed project demonstrates a performance level of 59%, indicating a need for further efforts to meet the recommended standards. While the Salima youth office has established baselines and measures project results against the Malawi 2063 agenda, there is room for improvement in aligning these measures with the project's specific context. Training on participatory project monitoring processes has not been provided to staff, volunteers, and stakeholders, highlighting a gap in capacity-building efforts. Additionally, the absence of a fully developed logical framework and monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan underscores the need for a more precise direction in measuring impact. Despite community members' limited involvement in routine project monitoring, volunteers are actively engaged despite a lack of systematic documentation of marginalized and vulnerable people's participation. Quarterly updates on project results are communicated through various channels, but there is a need for more structured processes to validate and modify project outcomes based on feedback from stakeholders. Addressing these areas of improvement will be essential to enhance effectiveness in measuring its impact and achieving desired outcomes.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

As Salima Youth Office does not undertake recruitment of volunteers, and nor are youth formally contracted, it was deemed that assessing this pillar was not applicable.

Summary

Table 4: Assessment Summary for Malawi – Salima

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	87%	Most recommended requirements are met and requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	32%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	59%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	N/A	

The assessment across four key areas indicates that the pillar requiring most urgent intervention is in duty of care.

In the Designing and Delivering Projects pillar, Salima Youth Office has achieved a commendable score of 87%, reflecting robust community involvement and alignment with national policies. There remains room for improvement in addressing role disparities and enhancing primary actor engagement. Performance in the Duty of Care pillar is concerning, scoring only 32%, revealing significant gaps in safeguarding policies, volunteer training, and support, necessitating urgent enhancements to ensure the safety of all involved. While the Measuring Impact pillar fares moderately at 59%, there is a need for improvements in aligning impact measures with project contexts and implementing a more precise monitoring and evaluation plan.

4. THAILAND

Pillar 1: Design and delivering projects

At **79%**, the overall performance of the assessment programme regarding designing and planning is good and **requires only select improvements to meet the recommended standards**. There was a limited involvement of primary actors and community volunteers in project planning. However, following recruitment, volunteers actively contribute to both the design and implementation phases. The organization has not yet measured the carbon footprint resulting from project-related travel. This is due to the PSU Volunteer Centre's focus on cost-saving measures, such as communal travel arrangements and selecting nearby communities. No nature-based or eco-friendly solutions have been adopted because the PSU Volunteer Centre is currently prioritizing a campaign to reduce plastic and synthetic container usage. Volunteers were not adequately informed about the intended outcomes, and primary actors were not engaged in periodic reviews of project progress. The involvement of primary actors in project evaluations to determine outcomes was limited, with the PSU Volunteer Centre primarily responsible for arranging evaluation meetings and lessons learned sessions.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall score for duty of care is **38%**, indicating that this area **requires significant improvements to meet the recommended standard**.

Positive aspects include the provision of a volunteer handbook, training for volunteers on policies and guidelines, quarterly discussions on project risks, processes to address safety and security through the handbook, project lesson workshops, signed consent forms for placements, coordination with community mentors, development of safeguarding policies, adherence to governmental codes of conduct, mandatory training on safeguarding, background checks, and verification of identification documents during recruitment.

Challenges include the lack of access to safeguarding documents, partial understanding among volunteers on safeguarding procedures, inadequate training on safeguarding, absence of measures to prevent and respond to abuse, unclear reporting mechanisms, resource constraints, lack of recruitment policy guidance, absence of safeguarding-related interview questions, exclusion of safeguarding elements in job advertisements, undefined safeguarding roles in job profiles, lack of training on roles and responsibilities regarding abuse prevention, and absence of refresher training. Addressing these challenges is essential to further improve the programme's effectiveness and ensure the safety and well-being of staff, volunteers, and community members.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the assessment programme regarding measuring impact is **76%** and **suggests some improvements need to be made to meet the recommended standards**.

The assessment of Pillar 3: Measuring Impact indicates an overall performance of 76%, with room for improvement to meet recommended standards. The organization has established baselines for measuring project results and conducts pre- and post-project training reports to assess impacts. Staff and volunteers participated in monitoring training as per the training plan, and a project logical framework with indicators, targets, and assumptions has been developed. However, there were shortcomings in measuring impact, as output, outcome, and potential impact measures are only partly established. While there were systems for community and stakeholder participation in data collection, they were not fully implemented. The monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan (MEL) was partly developed, lacking complete documentation and results sharing with all stakeholders. Quarterly paper-based updates were provided to partners, but scholars are limited in their involvement in project evaluation. While progress has been made, efforts to enhance impact measurement and stakeholder engagement are needed for more comprehensive assessment and reporting.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the assessment programme regarding managing volunteers is 100%.

In Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers, the programme's performance in managing volunteers was 100%. VSO & Partners implemented a transparent, equitable, and fair volunteer recruitment policy and process. All volunteer applications underwent screening against role descriptions, and candidates were informed clearly of non-selection reasons. Each volunteer role had a

documented job description, ensuring clarity of responsibilities. Stipends/remuneration were consistent across national and community volunteers, with roles advertised on various platforms and background checks conducted during the selection process. Organizational policies/guidelines were provided to volunteers during onboarding/orientation in an easily understandable format, with partners oriented on volunteer management through documented agreements. Volunteers received comprehensive training about their placement, including understanding social and cultural norms and financial considerations, and their performance was attributed to the induction, training, and support provided. Work plans with timeframes and deliverables were developed collaboratively, and performance reviews were conducted in line with the frequencies agreed. Post-placement volunteer debriefs facilitated personal development discussions and were utilized for hiring decisions and annual report development. Addressing volunteer grievances sometimes took time, but they were handled systematically.

Summary

Table 5: Assessment summary for Thailand-PSU Volunteer Center¹

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and delivery	79%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards and most recommended requirements are met
2) Duty of Care	38%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standards.
3) Measuring Impact	76%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards and most recommended requirements are met
4) Managing Volunteers	100%	Meets recommended standards

The assessment reveals notable strengths and areas for improvement. In Pillar 1, the design and planning aspect scored well at 79%, with commendable involvement of primary actors in project planning and implementation. Still, there were shortcomings in measuring carbon footprint and eco-friendly solutions. Pillar 2, focusing on the duty of care, scored 38%, indicating room for enhancement despite positive aspects like the provision of handbooks and training. Pillar 3, measuring impact, scored 76%, showing progress in establishing baselines and training staff for monitoring, but gaps remain in fully implementing systems for data collection and results sharing. Pillar 4, managing volunteers, received a perfect score of 100%, highlighting excellent practices in recruitment, training, support, and performance management, ensuring a positive volunteer experience and organizational effectiveness. While the programme demonstrates strengths in volunteer management, addressing the identified challenges across all pillars is crucial for further improvement and sustained success.

5. PHILIPPINES

The ACTIVE project in Philippines, operating in three provinces, focuses on resilient livelihoods, climate resilience, and peace-building in collaboration with partners United Youth of the

¹ Remark: 0-50% = orange (class interval = 50), 51-80% = yellow (class interval =30), 81-100% = green (class interval =20)

Philippines-Women (UnYPhil-Women), Inc. and Lanao Aquatic and Marine Fisheries Center for Community Development (LAFCCOD). A crucial aspect of the ACTIVE programme involves establishing connections between community members and those responsible for enabling primary actors to exercise their agency, demand and achieve access to services and opportunities. Empowering individuals to forge and acknowledge these connections has not only fostered active citizenship but also cultivated social accountability. Present initiatives within the ACTIVE programme aim to enhance resilience and promote peace in the Bangsamoro Region by integrating agroecology and peace-building efforts within a MILF (MILF) sub-camp. This aligns with the Bangsamoro people's desire for self-determination, and by employing agroecology, facilitates volunteer-driven community development. Livelihood enhancement is central to the project, as community members express that meeting their families' basic needs enables greater community engagement. Agroecology also empowers former combatants, marginalized women, youth, and persons with disabilities by granting them agency and decision-making authority over sustainable, fair, and climate-resilient livelihoods.

Pillar 1: Design and delivering projects

The overall performance of the assessed project in designing and delivering projects is **84%**. **The requires requires only select improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

The project demonstrates a comprehensive and inclusive approach to community development, with active participation from primary actors and volunteers throughout the project lifecycle. The scale and outcomes are meticulously designed, incorporating inputs from the target community through various engagement methods such as workshops, focus group discussions, and assessments, ensuring sustainability and informed decision-making. Additionally, the project effectively supports activities that empower marginalized and vulnerable groups, promoting sustainable development outcomes with the support of committed stakeholders and dedicated funding. While the project strives for environmental protection and climate adaptation, there are opportunities for further improvement in eco-friendly practices. The project fosters an enabling environment where volunteers and primary actors feel valued and empowered, contributing to their meaningful engagement and ownership in implementation decisions. Furthermore, project evaluations are conducted transparently, with active involvement from primary actors in validating outcomes and implementing recommendations, showcasing the project's commitment to accountability and continuous improvement. Overall, these efforts highlight the project's success in creating positive impact and fostering community resilience.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of the assessment programme regarding designing and planning is **99%**, **requiring only select improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

The organization diligently developed safety and security guidelines, ensuring comprehensive documentation within the Manual of Operations, which included risk assessments, mitigation plans, and security induction plans, fostering a culture of safety and awareness among volunteers and community members. Up-to-date risk assessments were integral to volunteer pre-placement training, supported by clear communication channels and community involvement in identifying and reporting risks. Staff and volunteers were effectively informed about and inducted on safeguarding policies, ensuring adherence and reporting against any violations, with safeguarding measures publicly displayed and accessible at the community level. The organization demonstrated a commitment to child protection through proactive

measures, including clear stipulations in policies, well-defined roles and responsibilities, and collaboration with local agencies. Volunteers were prohibited from working within residential care facilities for children, and safe recruitment practices were upheld, including background checks and adherence to a code of conduct. Mitigation systems were in place to safeguard volunteers' health and well-being before, during, and after placements, ensuring a supportive and secure environment throughout their assignments.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the assessed project in designing and planning is **100% and all recommended requirements are met.**

Collaboratively with primary actors, VSO and its partners developed robust change indicators and established baselines to measure progress throughout the project, supported by comprehensive output, outcome, and impact measures outlined in the MEL Plan and Project Log frame. Systems were effectively implemented to enable community participation in monitoring data collection, ensuring transparency and accountability in project management. Training sessions were conducted regularly to equip staff, volunteers, and stakeholders with the necessary skills for participatory project monitoring, aligning with the project's schedule and goals. Documented evidence highlighted active involvement from marginalized and vulnerable individuals in monitoring and validating project data, fostering inclusivity and informed decision-making. Furthermore, project evaluations, community feedback, and routine monitoring activities actively engaged diverse stakeholders, including volunteers and local government officials, in assessing project outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. The project's commitment to transparency and continuous communication was evident in the thorough documentation and dissemination of project results through various formats, ensuring stakeholders were well-informed and empowered throughout the project lifecycle.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the assessed project regarding designing and planning is **100% and most recommended requirements are met.**

The project has demonstrated a robust framework for recruiting, onboarding, and supporting volunteers, ensuring transparency, equity, and fairness throughout the process. The recruitment policy and process were well-documented, providing clear guidelines for screening, selecting, and communicating with candidates. Volunteers received comprehensive training and orientation, including information on organizational policies, cultural norms, and financial considerations. Partners were effectively oriented on volunteer management, aligning expectations and responsibilities. Performance reviews and collective reflections facilitated ongoing assessment and improvement of volunteer impact, while post-placement debriefs provided valuable insights for future programme development.

Overall, the organization's commitment to volunteer recruitment and management has contributed to the success of its programmes and the empowerment of volunteers to make meaningful contributions to marginalized and vulnerable communities.

Summary

Table 6: Assessment summary for Philippines: ACTIVE

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	84%	Requires some improvement in measuring carbon footprint to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	99%	Most recommended requirements are met
3) Measuring Impact	100%	Most recommended requirements are met
4) Managing Volunteers	100%	Most recommended requirements are met

Remark: 0-50% = orange (class interval = 50), 51-80% = yellow (class interval =30), 81-100% = green (class interval =20)

Overall, the assessed project demonstrates strong performance across all pillars, showcasing a comprehensive and inclusive approach to community development. In Pillar 1: Designing and Delivering Projects, the project exhibits meticulous planning and engagement with primary actors, resulting in sustainable outcomes and empowerment of marginalized groups, although there are opportunities for further improvement in eco-friendly practices. Pillar 2: Duty of Care highlights the organization's commitment to safety and child protection, with robust measures in place to safeguard volunteers' well-being throughout their assignments. Pillar 3: Measuring Impact showcases exceptional performance in monitoring and evaluation, ensuring transparency and accountability in project management, and fostering community participation in assessing outcomes and identifying areas for improvement. Finally, Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers demonstrates a strong framework for recruiting, training, and supporting volunteers, contributing to the success of the project and the empowerment of volunteers to make meaningful contributions. Overall, these efforts underscore the project's commitment to creating positive impact and fostering community resilience, while also highlighting areas for continued enhancement to further strengthen project effectiveness and sustainability.

6. ZIMBABWE

The Index was administered with two organisations in Zimbabwe, given the extensive network of VIOs that VSO works with, and the relationships that VSO has with these organisations and partners. The first organisation, VIONET and the second is TSURO.

ZIMBABWE-VIONET

Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) is a Volunteer Organisation that focusses on volunteer coordination and advocacy. It is responsible for informing and advising volunteer placement, their welfare and their discharge, volunteer management and governance as mandated through the volunteer coordination centres that are being currently established.

Pillar 1: Design and delivering projects

The overall performance of Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) Zimbabwe regarding design and delivery is **63%**, indicating that **some improvements are required to meet the recommended standard**.

The project demonstrated commendable efforts in actively engaging the target community, utilizing a bottom-up approach where community members and volunteers played integral roles in designing projects and advocating for context-specific solutions. Various methodologies and evidence documents inform decision-making, emphasizing community engagement as

paramount. Additionally, the project aimed to support marginalized groups through advocacy and empowerment initiatives, although challenges such as limited resource commitment persisted. There were missed opportunities such as not measuring the carbon footprint resulting from project-related travel. Furthermore, while an enabling environment was fostered where volunteers felt like equal actors alongside staff and partners, there were issues such as the lack of differentiation between staff and volunteers and challenges in evaluation planning and implementation. Moving forward, addressing these challenges, and building upon existing strengths will be essential for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of the project design and planning processes.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance of VIONET regarding duty of care is **41%, requiring significant improvements to meet recommended standards.**

The assessment of safety and security guidelines highlighted several areas needing improvement. The organization lacked thorough documentation of policies and procedures, resulting in difficulties aligning with legislation. Volunteer training was partial, and resource allocation sparked internal conflict. Processes for addressing safety and security risks were limited, with unclear risk communication to stakeholders. Risk assessments varied in frequency and format, and volunteers' consent to placement was challenging due to policy absence. Safeguarding policies existed but lacked precise reporting mechanisms, defined roles, and adequate resources. Despite prohibiting volunteer involvement in orphanages, safeguarding practices were inconsistent, with recruitment checks and training gaps. However, mitigation systems were in place to support volunteers' health and well-being.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of VIONET regarding measuring impact is **71%, requiring some improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

VSO and partners have developed change indicators and established baselines for measuring progress, using primary data and innovative approaches like Sweat Equity². Relevant staff and volunteers received training on participatory monitoring processes, enhancing inclusivity. Marginalized groups participate in monitoring and validating project data, although inconsistently due to resource constraints. Evaluations, case studies, and community feedback assess volunteers' contributions, but monitoring involvement varies. Project reports validate and modify results based on feedback, communicated through verbal and paper-based formats to communities, stakeholders, and partners. Regular updates ensure ongoing communication and collaboration, albeit primarily with key partners and local authorities.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of VIONET's member organisations regarding managing volunteers is **70% and requires some improvement to meet recommended standards.**

The evaluation of the organisations' volunteer management pillar scored 70%. The organization actively recruits volunteers to support its mandate, with documented recruitment policies

² One uses the resources that are there and available at their disposal at that point of time. This is one way to contribute to organisational strengthening/change if external funding is not forthcoming/available.

emphasizing transparency and fairness. However, implementing these policies can be inconsistent, occasionally relying on informal methods. Thorough screening processes align volunteer applications with role descriptions, although remuneration policies vary. Volunteers receive comprehensive onboarding and orientation, including relevant organizational policies and cultural insights. Partners are oriented on volunteer management, with clear expectations outlined in agreements. Volunteers receive appropriate training and collaborate on structured work plans but lack a predetermined frequency for performance reviews. Post-placement debriefs capture personal development but are inconsistently documented. Efforts are made to address volunteer grievances, although logistical challenges may impact response times.

Summary

Table 7: Assessment summary for Zimbabwe: VIONET

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	63%	Requires some improvement to meet recommended standard
2) Duty of Care	41%	Requires significant improvements to meet recommended standard
3) Measuring Impact	71%	Requires some improvement to meet recommended standard
4) Managing Volunteers	70%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standard

The findings show that VIONET, a Volunteer Organisation in Zimbabwe, plays a pivotal role in volunteer coordination, advocacy, and individual volunteering, focusing on informing, advising, and managing volunteer placement, welfare, and discharge.

The organization operates through established volunteer coordination centres and emphasizes grassroots engagement through area coordinating committees.

Despite facing barriers to entry, such as limited opportunities and resistance from larger organizations, VIONET advocates for a national volunteering strategy and promotes income-generating activities among volunteers. The organization's performance across four pillars highlights strengths and areas for improvement: while design and planning efforts demonstrate community engagement and empowerment, resource commitment and evaluation planning challenges persist. Additionally, duty of care and managing volunteers require significant improvements, particularly in safety and security guidelines, volunteer training, and consistency in policy implementation. Though further attention is necessary in managing volunteers, there has been significant improvement in measuring impact and managing volunteers, with the organisation moving from requiring significant improvements (red) to one that is of average performance (yellow). Despite these challenges, VIONET's impact measurement meets standards, showcasing its commitment to inclusivity and collaboration in project evaluation and reporting. Efforts to address gaps in managing volunteers, such as standardizing recruitment processes and documenting post-placement debriefs, will enhance the organization's effectiveness and sustainability in promoting volunteerism and community development.

ZIMBABWE-TSURO

The TSURO project prioritizes sustainable agriculture, focusing on agroecology to safeguard the environment and promote community-based seed systems. It also emphasizes economic growth, sustainable farming, and holistic land and livestock management across sixteen wards to foster peaceful and empowered communities. TSURO collaborates with stakeholders, including SRHR champions, seed study groups, and commodity groups, while engaging in policy advocacy and lobbying. The project strongly emphasizes youth involvement in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) plans, with twenty-three youth volunteers facilitating information sharing and plan development. Additionally, twenty youth film screening facilitators disseminate films on climate change, disability inclusion, and migration. TSURO conducts training sessions on Public Environmental Health, covering topics like WASH, SRHR, food and nutrition security, and mental health while working with community health clubs in the wards. Economic strengthening efforts include promoting farm produce marketing and providing training in business skills and financial literacy through initiatives like Chimani Delights³. Support departments such as M&E, Finance, and Administration are crucial for project operations. Community engagement involves training interested residents in team building through partnerships. Student interns are engaged through application and interview processes, with some fulfilling academic requirements without pay.

Pillar 1: Design and delivery

The overall performance of the assessed organisation regarding design and delivery is **76%**, **requiring only select improvements to meet the recommended standards.**

This score demonstrates the project's commitment to community-driven development, sustainability, and inclusivity. Through active participation and input from the target community, the project's scale and outcomes were meticulously designed to ensure relevance and ownership. The project actively supports marginalized groups and communities, prioritizing their involvement in decision-making and implementation processes. Additionally, environmental sustainability is emphasized through nature-based solutions, although there is room for improvement in measuring the project's carbon footprint. Volunteers are empowered as equal partners alongside staff and partners, contributing meaningfully to project implementation and decision-making.

Similarly, marginalized primary actors are recognized as equal partners in the project's decision-making process, although their participation in evaluations could be enhanced. Despite challenges, the project demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement, with evaluations designed to validate outputs and outcomes with community involvement, showcasing a participatory and adaptive approach to project implementation.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

The overall performance in the duty of care stands at 74%, indicating some improvements are required to meet recommended standards.

With an overall performance rating of 74%, it's evident that importance is attached to the safety and well-being of volunteers and staff. Efforts have been made to establish Safety and Security

³ This is an economic strengthening initiative that provides business skills and financial literacy to farmers, with a focus on value addition in the area of honey production

guidelines, although the lack of fully documented policies presents an area for improvement. Integration of risk assessments into pre-placement training ensures volunteers are adequately prepared, complemented by clear communication channels and consent mechanisms. Moreover, induction processes on safeguarding policies and accessible materials demonstrate a commitment to transparency and accountability. Despite challenges such as grey areas in policies and resource constraints, initiatives like collaborations with local agencies and recruitment practices underscore a proactive approach. Additionally, adherence to a comprehensive code of conduct and implementation of mitigation systems further solidifies the organization's dedication to duty of care, with ongoing efforts to enhance processes and training ensuring continuous improvement in safeguarding practices.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

The overall performance of the assessed organisation regarding measuring impact meets the standards at 85%.

The assessment demonstrates a high level of achievement in measuring impact, meeting the standards at 85%. VSO and its partners, in collaboration with primary actors, have established a robust framework for gauging project progress, including comprehensive change indicators and baseline benchmarks. The organization's focus on inclusive processes for data collection and routine monitoring, supported by tailored training programmes for staff and volunteers, ensures the active participation of all stakeholders. Documented evidence of marginalized and vulnerable individuals' involvement in monitoring and validation processes further strengthens the program's accountability and effectiveness. Additionally, commitment to evaluating projects, incorporating community feedback, and transparently documenting results in progress reports ensures continuous improvement and a meaningful impact on the lives of marginalized communities. Overall, the project's approach to measuring impact reflects a comprehensive and participatory strategy, poised to deliver sustainable outcomes and address the needs of the target population effectively.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

The overall performance of the assessed organisation regarding managing volunteers is 75% and requires some improvements to meet recommended standards.

The organization effectively recruits volunteers to support its organizational mandate, prioritizing transparency and fairness despite lacking documented recruitment processes. Volunteers undergo comprehensive onboarding, including training on organizational policies and guidelines, and are briefed on their roles and placement area expectations. Partners are briefed on volunteer management, and mutual expectations are clearly outlined. The value of induction, training, and support is evident in volunteer performance, guided by detailed work plans and periodic performance reviews. The evaluation of volunteer performance involves collective reflections, engaging community members and project staff, and demonstrating a holistic approach. However, the organization lacks a structured debriefing process post-placement, and there is room for improvement in utilizing debrief information for future hiring decisions. Overall, while there are areas of strength, there are also opportunities for enhancement in volunteer management practices.

Summary

Table 8: Assessment summary for Zimbabwe-TSURO

Pillar	Percentage	Performance Summary
1) Design and Delivery	76%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
2) Duty of Care	74%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
3) Measuring Impact	85%	Most recommended requirements are met and requires some improvements to meet recommended standards
4) Managing Volunteers	75%	Requires some improvements to meet recommended standards

“Tsuru” across its four pillars reveals a comprehensive approach to community-driven development, sustainability, and inclusivity. Pillar 1 highlights the project’s commitment to active community participation and environmental sustainability, yet suggests areas for improvement in measuring environmental impact and involving marginalized actors in evaluations. Pillar 2 emphasizes the project’s strides in prioritizing safety and well-being, though it identifies the need to strengthen safeguarding practices. Pillar 3 showcases the project’s commendable performance in monitoring progress and involving stakeholders, reflecting a commitment to accountability and effectiveness. Pillar 4 underscores effective volunteer recruitment and support mechanisms, while also noting opportunities to enhance debriefing processes and volunteer engagement. Overall, TSURO demonstrates strengths in community engagement, sustainability, and volunteer management, with the potential for further improvement in environmental impact measurement, safeguarding practices, and volunteer engagement.

Reflections across countries

The programmes assessed under **Pillar 1** demonstrated strong community engagement, emphasizing community-driven development in The TSURO project in Zimbabwe and active community engagement in VIONET in Zimbabwe. The ACTIVE project in the Philippines showcased comprehensive community development, while youth activities implemented as part of NVIF in Salima, Malawi, displayed strong community participation. Additionally, implementation of the NVIF in Mzuzu, Malawi, highlighted robust community engagement, and the VMC programme in Cambodia emphasized community participation. Efforts in community engagement were also observed in JJYC in Nepal.

The PSU Volunteer Center, Thailand, showed commendable planning. However, the assessment revealed common areas for improvement. The Thailand-PSU Volunteer Center had limited involvement of primary actors and volunteers, lacked carbon footprint measurement, and did not adopt eco-friendly solutions. Jan Jagaran Youth Club in Nepal needs improvement in role clarification and communication of evaluation findings. Cambodia’s VMC programme faced

challenges related to primary actor involvement and resource constraints. Activities undertaken in Malawi as part of the NVIF demonstrated gaps in outcome evaluations and inclusivity, with NVIF in the Salima District needing to address disparities and enhance primary actor engagement. The ACTIVE project in the Philippines requires improved eco-friendly practices and primary actor involvement in evaluations. VIONET in Zimbabwe lacked resource commitment and carbon footprint measurement. Lastly, the TSURO project in Zimbabwe needs to improve in measuring carbon footprint and enhancing primary actor participation in evaluations.

Various needs and strengths emerge when assessing programmes under **Pillar 2: Duty of Care**. Despite offering handbooks and training, the PSU Volunteer Center in Thailand requires improvement and is lacking in documentation and training in safeguarding. While having safety guidelines and pre-placement training, the Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC) in Nepal must address documentation and training gaps. Cambodia's VMC programme lacks clear safeguarding policies, training, and reporting mechanisms, necessitating significant improvements. NVIF programs, particularly in Mzuzu City and the Salima District, require substantial enhancements, ranging from volunteer training gaps to incomplete documentation and risk communication. The ACTIVE project in the Philippines needs minor adjustments, excelling in various aspects of safety and training. However, the Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) in Zimbabwe and the TSURO project in Zimbabwe require significant improvements, facing challenges such as incomplete documentation, training, and risk communication, despite notable efforts in certain areas.

Various programmes exhibit differing performance levels in **Pillar 3: Measuring Impact Assessment**. The PSU Volunteer Center in Thailand shows a performance of 76%, and some improvements are needed, particularly in fully establishing output, outcome, and potential impact measures, along with complete documentation and dissemination of monitoring, evaluation, and learning plans. Conversely, Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC) in Nepal excels with a 91% rating, demonstrating robust adherence to standards and comprehensive community involvement in monitoring and validation processes. VMC in Cambodia scores 76%, indicating satisfactory achievement but requiring enhancements in training and participatory monitoring processes. Similarly, the National Volunteering and Internship Framework (NVIF) projects in Mzuzu City and Salima District show 68% and 59%, respectively, highlighting the need for improvements in training, developing logical frameworks, and stakeholder engagement.

On the other hand, The ACTIVE project in the Philippines achieves a perfect score of 100%, showcasing exemplary practices in establishing change indicators, community involvement, and transparent reporting. Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) in Zimbabwe scores 71%, indicating satisfactory performance with room for improvement in consistent community involvement and documentation. Finally, The TSURO project in Zimbabwe demonstrates commendable performance at 85%, emphasizing inclusive processes, community engagement, and transparent reporting for meaningful impact assessment and continuous improvement.

In **Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers**, the PSU Volunteer Center in Thailand demonstrates exceptional performance at 100%, marked by transparent recruitment, clear job descriptions, comprehensive training, and structured performance reviews, albeit with occasional delays in addressing grievances. Jan Jagaran Youth Club (JJYC) in Nepal scores 70%, indicating a need for improvements in debriefing processes and performance reviews despite commendable

transparency in recruitment and training. VMC in Cambodia achieves 80%, excelling in recruitment transparency and training but needing enhancements in informing volunteers about financial aspects and implementing formalized debriefs. In contrast, The ACTIVE Project in the Philippines scores 100%, showcasing a robust framework for volunteer management, including transparent recruitment, comprehensive training, structured performance reviews, and effective debriefing processes. Lastly, the Volunteer Involving Organisations Network (VIONET) in Zimbabwe achieves 70%, showing inconsistent implementation of documented recruitment policies but providing comprehensive onboarding and training, albeit with irregular performance reviews and debriefs. Similarly, The TSURO project in Zimbabwe scores 75%, displaying effective recruitment and onboarding processes but lacking structured debriefing and utilization of debrief information for future decisions.

Across the assessed projects and programmes, there are varying strengths and areas for improvement. The PSU Volunteer Center in Thailand demonstrates excellent volunteer management practices but need enhancements in designing eco-friendly solutions and ensuring duty of care. In contrast, the JJYC project in Nepal shows commendable efforts in involving the community and measuring impact but requires improvements in managing volunteers and clarifying responsibilities. VMC holds promise but needs enhancements across all pillars, particularly in volunteer management and data collection. These challenges are related to the structure and scale of the programme.

Conversely, The ACTIVE project in the Philippines excels across all pillars, demonstrating comprehensive approaches to community development. At the same time, VIONET in Zimbabwe shows strengths in community engagement but needs improvements in managing volunteers and duty of care. Finally, Tsuro in Zimbabwe emphasizes community-driven development and sustainability, highlighting strengths in volunteer management and stakeholder involvement but requiring enhancements in environmental impact measurement and safeguarding practices. Addressing identified gaps is crucial for enhancing effectiveness and sustainability across all assessed projects and programmes.

Table 9: Summary of Index Assessment Results across countries⁴

Pillar	THA PSU	NEP JJYC	CAM VMC	MLW MZUZU	MLW SALIMA	PHIL ACTIVE	ZBW TSURO	ZBW VIONET
1) Design and Delivery	79%	71%	79%	79%	87%	84%	76%	63%
2) Duty of Care	38%	72%	40%	35%	32%	99%	74%	41%
3) Measuring Impact	76%	91%	76%	68%	59%	100%	85%	71%
4) Managing Volunteers	100%	70%	80%	N/A	N/A	100%	75%	70%

⁴ 40-50% = orange (class interval = 50), 51-80% = yellow (class interval =30), 81-100% = green (class interval =20)

Conclusions

The second year of the implementation of the R&I Index has generated findings that should be used to guide capacity-building efforts of VSO partners moving forward.

Across all participating projects, the trends show that the areas with the highest performance are in **design & delivery** and **measuring impact** and those which require most attention is **duty of care** and **managing volunteers**.

Table 10: Longitudinal assessment summary for projects over two years

Country	Programme	Assessment Year	Design and Delivery	Duty of Care	Measuring Impact	Managing Volunteers	Remark
Thailand	PSU	2023	79%	38%	76%	100%	
Nepal	JJYC	2022	71%	72%	91%	70%	Assessment across different timelines for the same programme
	JJYC	2023	67%	78%	79%	91%	
Cambodia	VMC	2023	79%	40%	76%	80%	Assessment across different timelines for the same programme
	VMC	2022	73%	37%	50%	77%	
Malawi	MZUZU	2023	79%	35%	68%	N/A	Assessment across different timelines for the different programme in same country
	SALIMA	2023	87%	32%	59%	N/A	
	COPA	2022	67%	26%	83%	55%	
Philippines	ACTIVE	2023	84%	99%	100%	100%	
Zimbabwe	VIONET	2023	63%	41%	71%	70%	Assessment across different timelines for the same programme
	VIONET	2022	53%	24%	33%	32%	
	TSURO	2023	76%	74%	85%	75%	

Design & delivery tasks and activities are not reliant on formalised relationships with volunteers, and are not influenced by the nature of volunteer engagement. While scores are generally high for design and delivery, there is room for improvement across almost all partners. This may be due to the fact that many of the assessed organisations are engaging different types of volunteers on an organic basis, and that volunteer or volunteer skillsets are not planned into project activities from the outset, rather that the volunteers become embedded in project activities after formal design and planning has taken place. Primary actors are also not always included in project conceptualisation in some projects, such as VMC.

In other instances, volunteers are free to be able to decide their own area of work at community level, with minimal direct oversight and input from agencies such as the VMC Programme in Cambodia.

All projects scored low on aspects related to climate mitigation actions. This is in part due to the fact that adopting practices such as measuring carbon footprint and changing travel practices

have cost implications, and are not a priority for small organisations and projects operating on a limited budget, or where travel does not take place.

Primary actor engagement was generally high across all projects with the exception of Cambodia. The VMC Programme has as its primary focus, community development and volunteering as a means to building youth skills and employability. Youth activities are led by youth themselves to be implemented within communities, without engaging primary actors to determine and prioritise needs. The project itself is well aligned with the emphasis on youth engagement and volunteering by VSO, but there is a gap in the approach to volunteering which, based on the assessment, projects and priorities are not primary actor-led in identified communities. This is a project design issue, but is one that requires careful consideration and reflection in advance of the third year of assessment to take place by December 2024.

Duty of Care remains consistently weak across all partners, including Thailand which is administering the Index for the first time. While there have been minor improvements in scoring where the same partners have been assessed (such as Zimbabwe and Cambodia), there have also been small declines in this pillar among the assessed project in Nepal. All of the projects have remained in the same band on the scale; being the lowest band that requires significant improvements. Considerations to be noted here are that in both Malawi and Zimbabwe, the projects being assessed changed; and in Nepal, the research assistant administering the Index tool changed for the current year of assessment. This has potential to influence scoring, even though the decline in scoring on this pillar is only 6%. Regardless, there is clearly a high level of support needed by partners to develop safeguarding policies and procedures. This highlights the importance of ensuring that sufficient capacity-building is provided to participating projects to be able to demonstrate progress in the respective priority areas.

In both Cambodia and Malawi, the assessed projects are government-led interventions where the level of engagement between the implementing agency and the individual volunteer is limited, explaining the lack of direct engagement between volunteers and MoEYS, and in Malawi, these young people are contributing time and are not receiving stipends but for all intents and purposes, have a relatively loose association with the district youth offices.

The Index assessment found significant progress in **measuring impact** in countries where the same project has been assessed over two years (Nepal, Zimbabwe, Cambodia). In Cambodia, scoring for this pillar moved from the yellow band – requiring some improvements, to the green band where most recommended actions are in place for measuring impact.

Scores are high across all pillars for the project assessed in Philippines. Given the small scale of programme activities in Philippines, the projects that VSO are supporting do not have an expansive partner network. The assessment in Philippines is focussed on the implementation of ACTIVE and the range of policies and processes in place, contributing to these high results.

Managing Volunteers was assessed as generally high across the sample, with the exception of Malawi, where this was not assessed due to the nature of the volunteering activities and structure of youth offices within government. While scores remain high, a decline is noted in Nepal. There is no clear reason for this decline, and this needs to be explored further through capacity-building efforts in 2024.

With the exception of outliers in Nepal, which may be influenced by a change in the research assistant using the tool and a need to increase the specificity of the scoring, there has been

progress across all pillars in all projects involved in the first year of the Index study. This is in part due to increased awareness of gaps in practices and systems negatively affecting volunteering practice, and some additional capacity-building from VSO.

Recommendations

In order to strengthen VSO's engagement with the Global Standard and further integrate the R&I Index into VSO programmes and its affiliated projects, the following recommendations have been identified.

On the one hand, these recommendations refer to the results of the first assessment using the R&I Index; on the other hand, they refer to the further development of the Index itself and its implementation within VSO and the wider VfD sector:

The Recommendations for the R&I Index

Pillar 1: Design and delivery

- **Community Engagement:** Ensure active participation of primary actors and community volunteers in project design and planning processes to incorporate diverse perspectives and enhance project relevance and sustainability.
- **Inclusive Decision-Making:** Differentiate between staff and volunteer responsibilities and tasks clearly, and ensure equitable remuneration, benefits, and recognition to foster an inclusive environment and avoid disparities.
- **Project Alignment and Integration:** Align project design and planning with national policies and guiding principles to ensure consistency, sustainability, and effectiveness in achieving development objectives.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Implement eco-friendly practices and measure the project's carbon footprint resulting from project-related travel to mitigate environmental impacts and contribute to sustainability goals.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Ensure consistent sharing of evaluation findings and recommendations with primary actors and partners to enhance accountability, transparency, and learning from project outcomes.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Continuously review and enhance project design and planning processes to address identified gaps, build upon strengths, and maximize impact and effectiveness.

Pillar 2: Duty of Care

- **Documentation and Policies:** - Ensure thorough documentation of safety and security guidelines, safeguarding policies, and procedures to align with legislation and provide clear guidance to volunteers and staff.
- **Training and Awareness:** - Provide comprehensive training on policies, guidelines, and safeguarding procedures to volunteers and staff to ensure their understanding and adherence.

- **Risk Management:** Implement effective risk management strategies, including risk assessments, mitigation plans, and communication channels, to address safety and security risks and ensure the well-being of volunteers and staff.
- **Safeguarding Policies and Procedures:** Develop and enforce clear safeguarding policies and procedures, including reporting mechanisms, defined roles, and resources, to prevent and respond to abuse effectively.
- **Community Involvement and Communication:** Involve communities in identifying and reporting risks, ensure clear communication of potential risks to volunteers, and provide accessible materials to enhance awareness and understanding of safeguarding practices.
- **Recruitment Practices:** Implement safe recruitment practices, including background checks, code of conduct adherence, and training, to ensure the suitability and safety of volunteers.
- **Mitigation Systems:** Establish mitigation systems to support volunteers' health and well-being before, during, and after placements, ensuring a supportive and secure environment throughout their assignments.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Continuously review and enhance duty of care frameworks, policies, and training programmes to ensure the safety and well-being of all stakeholders involved.

Pillar 3: Measuring Impact

Below are the summaries of the recommendations grouped by the issue of measuring impact:

- **Establishment of Baselines and Metrics:** Ensure the establishment of baselines for measuring project results and conduct pre- and post-project training reports to assess impacts.
- **Development of Change Indicators:** Collaborate with primary stakeholders to develop robust change indicators aligned with project goals.
- **Inclusive Data Collection and Monitoring:** Implement systems for community and stakeholder participation in data collection and routine monitoring to ensure transparency and accountability.
- **Training and Capacity Building:** Provide comprehensive training on participatory monitoring processes to staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to enhance impact evaluation.
- **Community Involvement:** Ensure active involvement of marginalized and vulnerable individuals in monitoring and validating project data.
- **Documentation and Reporting:** Thoroughly document and disseminate project results through various formats to ensure stakeholders are well-informed and empowered.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly assess project outcomes and modify results based on feedback from stakeholders to ensure continuous improvement.

Pillar 4: Managing Volunteers

- **Volunteer Recruitment, Training, and Support:** Maintain excellent practices in volunteer recruitment, training, and support.
- **Communication and Transparency:** Continue transparent communication with volunteers regarding reasons for non-selection. Improve communication with volunteers regarding financial costs associated with their placements to ensure transparency.
- **Volunteer Grievance Resolution:** Ensure timely resolution of volunteer grievances to uphold organizational effectiveness.

- **Volunteer Debriefs and Performance Reviews:** Establish formalized processes for volunteer debriefs and performance reviews to enhance volunteer support and evaluation. Implement consistent frequency for performance reviews to provide regular feedback to volunteers. Formalize debriefing processes to effectively support volunteers' personal development and future aims.
- **Documented Policies and Procedures:** Develop documented volunteer recruitment policies and procedures to ensure transparency and consistency. Strengthen the implementation of documented recruitment policies to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer selection.
- **Training and Orientation:** Provide comprehensive training and support to volunteers, including orientation on organizational policies and cultural norms.
- **Standardization in Recruitment:** Establish clear job descriptions and standardized selection processes to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer recruitment. Formalize recruitment processes to ensure transparency and fairness in volunteer selection.
- **Performance Evaluation and Development:** Implement structured performance evaluation mechanisms and post-placement debriefs to support volunteer effectiveness and development. Establish consistent procedures for performance reviews and documentation of post-placement debriefs to support volunteer development effectively. Develop a structured debriefing process post-placement to capture valuable insights for future programme improvement and volunteer development.
- **Robust Framework Maintenance:** Continue the robust framework for volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and support to maintain transparency and equity.
- **Documentation and Accountability:** Enhance documentation of volunteer management processes to ensure consistency and accountability.

Recommendations for study design and methodology

- It is advisable to compare within the same project but at different times (years) to observe improvements—for example, Zimbabwe-VIONET and Cambodia. Conversely, it may be necessary to identify the causes of the decline to address the issues. For instance, in the case of Nepal (assessment in 2022 showed better results than in 2023 in almost all pillars except Measuring Impact), as shown in the table... which illustrates the comparison of projects participating in assessments in 2022 and 2023. There are the same projects in three countries: Cambodia in the VMC project, Nepal in the JJYC project, and Zimbabwe in the VIONET project, as for countries assessed in both years (2022 and 2023) but with new projects rather than the previous ones, it includes Malawi (the last project being COPA, and the latest projects being MZUZU and Salima).
- Furthermore, cross-country assessments may not accurately reflect equal comparisons because each country and each project may have different analyzing units, such as organizational units, community units, or sub-project units. Additionally, each country may have different networks, resources, and funding support for projects. Therefore, comparing projects at other times or with similar analyzing units can provide more precise assessment results and contribute to more effective project development.

The ACTIVE Programme is a multi-year grant from the UK government, worth £27m, running from April 2022. The programme will support the development of active citizenship across the Global South, so that some of the world's most marginalised people are able to lead their own development, claim their rights to better public services,, and hold people in power to account.



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