



JULY 2018

LASTING IMPACT REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

VSO is the leading independent international development organisation that works through volunteers. Knowledge Exchange is VSO's corporate platform, making the most of the skills of the private sector through impactful and innovative corporate volunteer placements.

The Lasting Impact Report surveyed the returned volunteers from nine companies who volunteered between 2014 and 2017. The findings show that 91% of respondents were more engaged with their company's CSR policy, 77% were better able to see how the company's operations affected the poor and marginalised and 78% were better able to see how the sustainability policy and operations could be improved. Most importantly, 74% actively made recommendations for positive change in their company.

Quote from survey

The time spent on the placement reinforced the power of bringing together the diverse approaches and perspectives from the private and NGO sphere in the service of a common purpose to which both feel strongly emotionally engaged. Together, we created ideas and practical interventions that in all likelihood neither party would have arrived at independently. This benefited first and foremost the communities we were working with but also enriched each partner in the process.



INTERNATIONAL CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING



International Corporate Volunteering (ICV) can be a good way for companies to meet sustainability, HR, CSR and other business drivers. It can also provide technical support and capacity-building to community organisations, as well as innovation to the development sector.

The UK's Department for International Development, which funds VSO Knowledge Exchange, recognises volunteerism as a key mechanism for addressing the Sustainable Development Goals – particularly SDG 17, which promotes cross sector collaboration.¹

A significant body of evidence now exists to show the positive impact that corporate volunteering placements have on employees, businesses, and the communities they serve.²

What is less understood is the extent to which employees return to work with a more “pro-poor” mindset that brings about social innovation within the company. As more companies aspire to be “purpose driven”, how can ICV help them meet the public and regulatory demand for sustainable business practices in the 21st century?

VSO's corporate partners have discovered that giving employees the opportunity to better understand people in their supply chains and customer bases, by “walking a mile in their shoes” can drive business innovation and help tap into underserved markets.

Survey Methodology

VSO sought evidence from our partnerships to demonstrate the impact that corporate volunteers have in propelling their companies toward becoming positive influences in the lives of poor and marginalised people. The findings of this survey have been compiled here into this report. Responses were given anonymously.

Of over **350** volunteers from **9** companies, **96** took part in the survey.

Nine companies who had participated in Knowledge Exchange between 2014 and 2017, were surveyed, to discover the various impacts of the programme on their staff and on the company. Companies that participated in the study include: **IBM, Syngenta, Mondelēz International, Citi, Shell, Berenschot, Achmea, Randstad and Accenture**

¹ <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism/volunteerism-and-global-goals>

² https://corporate-citizenship.com/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering_The_business_case-1.pdf

THE REPORT

Any form of experiential learning has four main stages of impact: engagement, learning, behaviour change and results.³ These can be divided by short term:

- 1. Engagement:** Participants finding the content and activities of the placement inspiring and motivating.
- 2. Learning:** Participants gaining useful knowledge.

And long term impacts of learning:

- 3. Behaviour:** The experience helps the participants to work differently and, ideally, more effectively.
- 4. Results:** Changes in behaviour have positive business results.

This report will analyse the results of the Lasting Impact Survey, across these four stages of experiential learning.

1. Engagement

Companies are increasingly shaking off the notion that a sustainability strategy is simply a form of compliance. Instead, they are using it as a way of engaging employees and customers with its values and mission statement. However, there is often a gulf between business sustainability activities, and employee engagement with them. Therefore employees feel distanced from their company's strategy and are not certain of their role within it.

ICV offers the opportunity to close that gap. By directly engaging employees, particularly emerging leaders and top talent, ICV empowers these staff members to see first-hand the effects of the company's products, services and operations on the poor and marginalised.

91% of respondents strongly agree that their volunteering experience increased awareness of their company's CSR/sustainability policy.

Not only do employees become more engaged with their companies' CSR/sustainability strategy during their placement, the volunteering experience motivates them to become more engaged on their return to work.

“Volunteering was the tool we chose to give our senior leaders the insight and first-hand experience required to deliver our sustainability strategy.”

Syngenta's Head of Public Policy and Sustainability, Juan Gonzalez-Valero

“It could change the way the volunteers think and work as a banker, which could indirectly impact performance. For me, going back to basics has really given me the opportunity to think more outside the box and to think about more creative and innovative solutions for clients (which is increasingly becoming more requested by our corporate clients).”

Quote from survey

“I definitely got a better understanding of what my company is doing to support poor people. I was inspired of the way my company is doing this with a win-win for all sides and I was happy to get involved.”

Quote from survey

³ <https://www.kirkpatrickpartners.com/Our-Philosophy/The-Kirkpatrick-Model>

⁴ https://www.taprootfoundation.org/sites/default/files/imce/Taproot-Business-Value-2016_CC.pdf



2. Learning

The return on investment of volunteering and pro bono programmes is normally seen through the lens of professional and leadership development and compared to other “classroom-based” forms of training. There is plenty of evidence to suggest skilled volunteering generates significant professional development for participants; especially in the areas of cross-cultural competence, team working, innovation, dealing with ambiguity, mentoring, and leadership development – particularly consensus building. However, VSO Knowledge Exchange works with its partners to look beyond this and discover what makes a good leader with the knowledge and skills to expand their company’s bottom line to include social, environmental and financial values.

77% strongly agree or agree that the volunteering experience increased understanding of how the operations of the business impact poor and marginalised people.

Because ICV participants engage directly with the people in their supply chains and customer bases, they gain valuable insights into how their companies can improve their sustainability strategy and, in turn, their products and services.

60% strongly agree or agree that the volunteering experience increased understanding of how the company’s products and services impact poor and marginalised people.

The aggregated statistics listed in this report include employees from companies who volunteered in places where their company does not have a presence or interest. Employees who engage in placements that specifically focus on their company’s supply chains, see a markedly higher increase in understanding of how their businesses affect poor and marginalised people. For example, when participants were asked whether they could identify ways the company’s sustainability policy could be improved, 68% said they could. However, employees from Mondelēz and Syngenta, who volunteer directly in their company’s sustainability activities, the difference in response is markedly higher.

While all well-designed ICV programmes can significantly develop professional and leadership skills, the survey results show an extra dimension of learning that takes place when ICV programmes are developed in this way.

83% Mondelēz & 78% Syngenta strongly agree or agree that the knowledge acquired helped identify ways that the company’s sustainability policy could be improved to further benefit poor and marginalised people.

78% Syngenta & **75%** Mondelēz employees agree or strongly agree that the knowledge acquired helped identify ways that the operations of their company could be improved to benefit poor and marginalised people.

“The programme has expanded my thoughts around *The Good Growth Plan* and sustainability. It has changed my perspective on food security and helped me connect with growers. I now ask myself the question; is this the best, most sustainable way for growth?”

Francois Burghgraeve, Syngenta

89% of Syngenta and **100%** of Mondelēz participants strongly agree or agree that the volunteering experience increased understanding of how their company’s products and services and operations impact poor and marginalised people.

“We were able to interact with people at every part of the agriculture value chain. This not only helped us understand the customer better but also gave us insights into how we could help in their economic and social empowerment, through interventions at the top of the chain, as well as the bottom.”

Swati Chawla, Global Head for HR Analytics & Reporting for Syngenta

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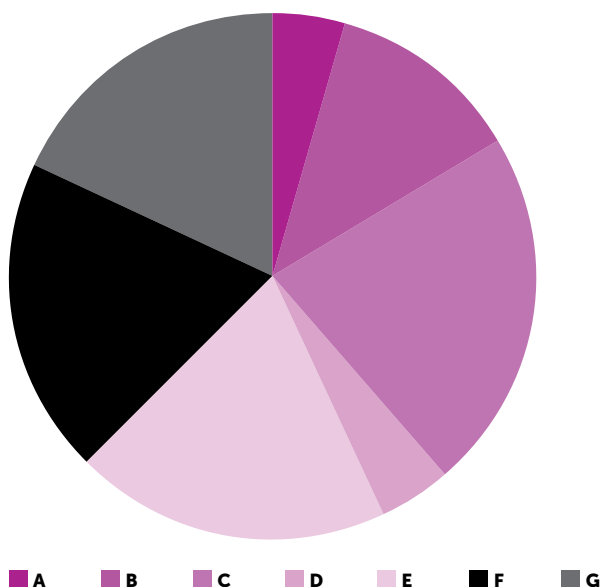


3. Changes in business behaviours

A more significant challenge facing companies investing in ICV, is turning engagement and learning into behaviour change both for the employee and the business as a whole. Inevitably, barriers exist to employees who wish to make changes directly after their return from placement – for example the employee’s position within the organisation may hinder influence or conflicting business drivers may stall innovation. However, our survey suggests that many employees are taking up the intrapreneurship mantle and making recommendations for change anyway.

40% encouraged their company to engage in or launch new initiatives to benefit poor or marginalised groups.

Company Changes



Stats Graphics

- A** 3% launched new products or services for low income consumers
- B** 8% launched new emerging market, HR, global supply chains initiatives
- C** 15% launched internal initiatives to support intrapreneurship, like an innovation fund or working group
- D** 3% increased company financial support for international development programmes
- E** 13% improved CSR performance
- F** 13% developed new cross sector partnerships
- G** 12% contributed to relevant policy level discussions

74% of respondents strongly agree or agree (Syngenta **89%**, IBM **85%**) that the knowledge acquired helped them to make recommendations for change.

“Syngenta so far as a company has mostly focused on big farmers but I think that smallholders are an area we need to focus on. The people who are designing the strategy for the business might not understand the challenges of smallholders so it is a fantastic learning opportunity for them. I think there is tremendous opportunity from a business perspective, to find effective ways of increasing the productivity of smallholders will get smallholders more involved and efficient. If we don’t do this then *The Good Growth Plan* - which is the philosophy behind the project - will not be realised. This platform allows everyone to share ideas and can certainly help us come up with innovations.”

Hassan Sazzadul, Syngenta Bangladesh Director

“I returned to Accenture to a position in corporate citizenship working in a role with a similar goal to my VSO placement. I better understood the audience and thought of new perspectives thanks to the placement.”

Quote from survey

“The way I learned to work together in a different culture and the value in that I try to apply in my daily work and make a change there where I can in my role.”

Quote from survey

“I think any time you are able to work with those who are marginalised and understand their perspective, it will always effect your future decisions. Travel is the world’s greatest social leveller.”

Quote from survey



“With the knowledge me and others acquired we started making a concrete plan how we as a company can help poor and marginalised people also in the Netherlands. We are studying ways to do this on a regular basis not only in projects or in other countries.”

Quote from survey

“Seeing the impact of our products on the people make you think more about how you can service them better.”

Quote from survey

“Our company is about moving humans forward and helping them to improve and develop to get the best possible opportunities in life with the right job, which is about more than poor or marginalised groups. I did join our diversity and inclusion board that started since 2018. So it is about awareness and adding value to people.”

Quote from survey

4. Business Results

It has only been in the last few years that companies have begun to see the potential for corporate volunteering to help them become a more sustainable, purpose driven organisation, but some have already experienced significant changes to their business operations. One of the first was Accenture, whose longstanding volunteer programme with VSO led to the creation of Accenture Development Partnerships: a not-for-loss, part of the Accenture business, which has since grown to become a leader in applying business and technology solutions for development organisations around the world.

Through Growing Together – a five-year VSO and Syngenta collaboration, aspiring to reach 100,000 farmers through a unique social franchise model – the company has found ways to improve access to a smallholder farmer market previously thought unreachable. Moreover, the partnership was presented at the UN Partnership Exchange in New York and the UN Commission on World Food Security at the FAO in Rome in 2017 for their work with VSO affecting the livelihoods for smallholder farmers in Bangladesh. In July 2018, it was featured at Business Fights Poverty Summit, hosted at Oxford Said Business School on a panel featuring Partnerships for Impact and Innovation.

“The growth of small businesses can help build a community; increasing wealth and opportunity for all... Citi has learned a lot about the challenges small businesses face in accessing finance, technology and markets. Citi is proud to be working with VSO Knowledge Exchange on such an innovative project.”

Rachel Barber, Citi, Head of Community Development Europe Middle East and Africa

IBM have long used their Corporate Service Corps programme, the largest of its kind with up to 350 employees a year working on team based assignments, to better understand emerging markets and customer segments.

As Roopa Wilson, Head of Diversity, IBM India states, working on ICV projects with disability organisations in India has brought significant business insight: “Most of the time we are technology-oriented, there’s a lot of things that we do to make our technology smarter or better, but at the end of the day there is a consumer base sitting out there and we don’t even know what their requirements are. There is a wealth of knowledge that organisations like VSO can bring in by articulating some of the challenges so that we can innovate our technologies.”

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, international corporate volunteering is an effective tool for companies who wish to engage their staff with their mission, values and sustainability strategy. Programmes, particularly those that closely relate to the core business, are proven to cultivate more engaged and motivated employees with contextualised knowledge that can generate genuine business innovation.

These innovations can also lead to opportunities to engage with new potential customers and embrace sustainable business fit for the 21st century. .

For companies that want to encourage a business culture that encompasses its values and where employees shape and drive forward its sustainability strategies, the evidence suggests international corporate volunteering can play a significant part in making this a reality.

VSO continues to be a leader in connecting businesses with issues affecting the poor and marginalised, helping business professionals use their skills to address these issues, whilst returning ready to improve the company and its operations for more sustainable global impact.

If you are interested in partnering with VSO Knowledge Exchange to engage, train and develop the leaders within your company, ready for the challenges of the 21st century please contact:
vsoknowledgeexchange.org
knowledge.exchange@vsoint.org or call
+44 (0)20 8780 7500.

**‘It’s not just philanthropy;
it’s leadership development
and business development
and it helps build economic
development in the
emerging world.’**

**Stanley Litow, Vice President of Corporate
Citizenship and Corporate Affairs, IBM.**





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