



Evidence based case study

Active citizenship in youth programmes

VSO Nigeria
2014



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Background note

Purpose	To increase understanding of how and when youth volunteering creates opportunities for, and contributes to, active citizenship in Nigeria
Project	Youth programmes Evidence based Case Studies
Context	Efforts to document youth volunteering achievements better and connect to rest of VSO's work; improve practice and guidance of how to do evidence based case studies
Scope	VSO Youth Programmes, VSO Nigeria
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Photo	Participatory workshop photo credit Janet Clark

In 2014/15 VSO Youth Programmes Team commissioned four Evidence Based Case Studies (EBCS) in Kenya, Nigeria, Bangladesh and Nepal to further understand the development results from youth programmes, and how these results have been achieved through youth volunteering. Each case study had a lead researcher and was guided by a steering group of VSO staff from country offices and VSO International. Terms of reference, research questions and research tools were designed for each. Learning and recommendations from the case studies will inform future youth programme development.

1. Summary

This evidence based case study aims to increase understanding of how and when youth volunteering creates opportunities for, and contributes to, active citizenship in Nigeria for national youth volunteers. The following research questions were developed to shape the study:

- What does active citizenship mean to young people?
- How and when does youth volunteering generate active citizenship? Does the Action at Home project and Youth Action Nigeria (YAN) network contribute towards fostering active citizenship?
- What factors enable/ prevent active citizenship resulting from youth volunteering?
- How and when do youth return volunteers (e.g. alumni) continue as active citizens through Action at Home projects and YAN activities?
- Are there benefits of active citizenship for youth volunteers, communities and civil society?
- What can VSO learn from VSO Nigeria's approach to supporting youth volunteering and active citizenship? What can be learnt from the model of the YAN network?
- What recommendations can be made for developing and managing future youth programmes to maximise contribution towards development impact by youth volunteers?

2. Context

Nigeria is classified as a lower middle income country with a GDP of \$331.7 billion.¹ There is significant poverty with more than half (68%) of the population living below \$1.25 per day and 43% of the population living in multi-dimensional poverty.² Nigeria has a low Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.504 which ranks the country 152 out of 187 worldwide. Life expectancy is 52 years, HIV prevalence is 3%, infant mortality rate is 78 per 1000 live births and under-five mortality rate is 124 per 1000 live births. The gross enrolment ratio for primary school is 81% with a drop-out rate of 20%. The overall primary cohort and gross enrolment ratio for secondary school is 44%.³ Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with a total population of 173 million⁴ and 70% of the population is under the age of 30 years-of-age. The unemployment rate stands at 24%⁵ and with such a significantly young population the projected population growth is high, as is the potential for increasing unemployment especially amongst young people



Volunteers use artwork to express their understanding of active citizenship

¹ World Bank (2013)

² Human Development Report Sustaining Human Progress: Reducing Vulnerabilities and Building Resilience, (2014) United Nations Development Programme

³ ibid p3

⁴ ibid p3

⁵ ibid p3

2.1. VSO programmatic approach

VSO Nigeria's country strategy (2012-15) shifted programming from three thematic areas (e.g. HIV and AIDS, secure livelihoods and education) to a youth-centred integrated programme which addresses the key priority of the productive engagement of Nigeria's youth in the peaceful development of the country. Working primarily in three geographic clusters (e.g. NW, North Central, and SW, with aspirations for South South in future), VSO Nigeria engages youth as active citizens in their own development through a range of programmes, including International Citizen Service (ICS).

ICS is a UK Government-funded development programme that brings together 18 to 25 year-olds from all backgrounds to fight poverty in overseas and UK communities. VSO Nigeria's ICS programme is delivering three projects in 2014/15 - all with their own project plans and theory of change:

- ICS Kwara Education (i.e. education thematic area)
- ICS Lafia Livelihoods (i.e. livelihoods thematic area)
- ICS Ikorodo Youth Participation and Governance project (i.e. P&G thematic area)

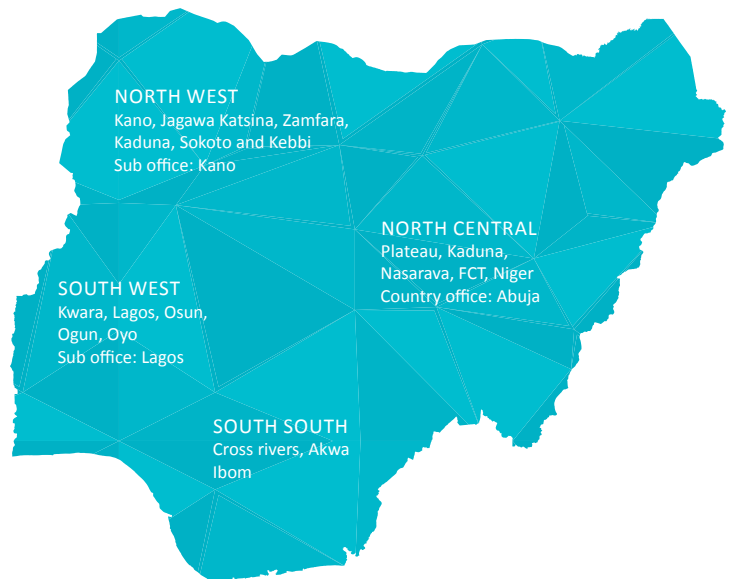
VSO Nigeria also supports other youth programmes:

- **YAN (Youth Action Nigeria):** A network of youth returned volunteers which is currently in development
- **NYSC (National Youth Service Corps):** An organisation set up by the Nigerian government to involve the country's graduates in the development of the country. Graduates of universities are required to take part in the programme for one year and are posted to locations away from their origin to promote unity and appreciation of other ethnic groups.
- **NGVP (National Graduate Volunteers Programme)** A one-year volunteering programme, which gives youth the opportunity to give back to society and contribute to raising the standard of education in Nigeria. The programme is a partnership between the NYSC and VSO for graduates with a bachelor's degree in education and focuses on improving the quality of secondary education in Nigeria.

ICS has three core and interdependent outcome areas which include the personal and social development of volunteers, project impact on local partners and communities, and the longer term strengthening of active citizenship⁶. The latter is the focus of this case study.

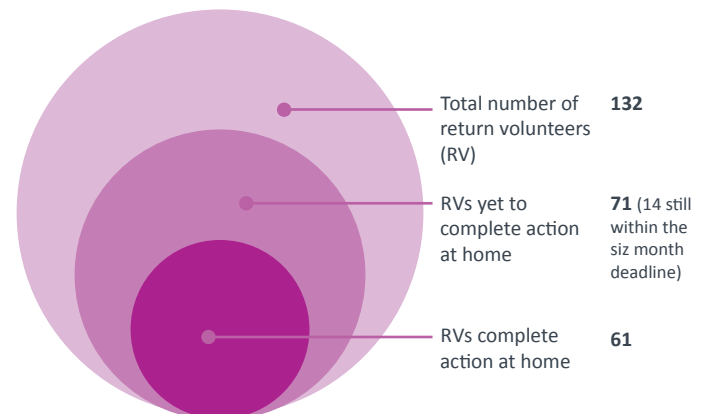
The diagram on the right shows the total number of return volunteers and indicates the proportion of who have completed or are still yet to complete their Action at Home projects – a number of which have not reached their submission deadline yet.

Figure 1: Priority areas and geopolitical clusters



These clusters are based on VSO operational needs not exactly geopolitical zones

Figure 2: Breakdown of numbers for completed and yet to be completed return volunteer Action at Home projects



2.2. Active citizenship

Active citizenship is about the growth of confidence, skills, knowledge and attitude of volunteers and the communities in which they engage. It can also act as a building block for promoting good governance and helps to strengthen democracy. In its approach to citizenship, ICS places an emphasis on governance and accountability as defined by Bond's effectiveness programme outcome which states that, "citizen and communities empowered, organised and effective in claiming their rights from national and local power holders"⁷. Citizenship can be a status linked to rights and obligations but also an active practice which is at the heart of the ICS approach which defines active citizenship as:

- Strengthening skills, attitudes, knowledge, motivation and confidence to step forward
- Inspiring other people to take action
- Questioning and debating the status quo
- Being involved in decision making that affects our lives
- Influencing people in power (e.g. at community/regional/national and international levels)⁸

VSO's theory of change identifies that active citizenship is promoted through community level volunteering, working with local organisations to support people within communities to act individually and collectively to shape their own development. This is achieved through volunteer placements to support the development of community volunteering programmes, direct training and support to community volunteers, and capacity building for organisations supporting community volunteering. At the national level, VSO supports the development of national networks of volunteer involving and placing organisations. The purpose of these networks ranges from knowledge sharing on best practice, research, influencing national policy, volunteering promotion and recognition, to increasing access to volunteering opportunities. Active citizenship is strengthened by supporting individuals and groups to engage and collaborate more in the life of their community through volunteering whilst creating formal and informal spaces for citizen engagement. These include community health volunteering initiatives, school management committees and youth clubs, through to advocacy or awareness raising campaigns.⁹

The ICS Active Citizenship Pack is a guide to promote active citizenship to volunteers post placement and offers examples of Action at Home projects. It contains a matrix of examples of types of actions (e.g. voice, time and money) at different levels (e.g personal, local, national and international) that can constitute as active citizenship.¹⁰

Figure 3: ICS Active Citizenship Pack

	 VOICE	 TIME	 MONEY
Personal	Talk to family or friends about an issue you have learnt about	Learn more through researching the issue	If you are able to, donate some money to an organisation doing work on the issue
Local	Write to the local newspaper about the issue	Organise an event in the area to tell people about the issue	Support a fundraising event for a local organisation
National	Write to your community leader to ask them to take action on the issue	Volunteer in your home country	Take part in a national event e.g. fundraising
Globally	Support an international campaign	Volunteer in another country – either physically or providing support remotely	Make a donation to an organisation working in another country

⁶ VSO Nigeria Programme Plan 2014/15

⁷ Assessing effectiveness in governance and accountability programmes BOND 2012

⁸ W26 Programme Frameworks. VSO ICS

⁹ VSO's Global Theory of Change (2014)

¹⁰ Active Citizenship Pack VSO ICS

3. Methodology

The work has been overseen by a multi-disciplinary steering group including representatives from VSO Nigeria, Youth Programmes Team, Impact and Accountability team and a National Youth Volunteer. Terms of reference were developed and agreed, and a series of research tools designed to collect evidence based on the research questions. The work was project managed by a member of the VSO Youth Programmes Team and the research was led by a member of the Impact and Accountability team.

The table below shows the range of methods used to collect data and the number of stakeholders involved:

Table 1: Data collection methods

One-to-one in depth semi-structured interviews with volunteers (20 ICS volunteers)
One-to-one in depth semi-structured interview with VSO Nigeria staff (2)
One-to-one in depth semi-structured interview with VSO Nigeria staff (2)
Series of eleven participatory workshops with 31 volunteers (26 ICS and 5 NVGP) facilitated by the research team. Methods included force field analysis, focus group discussion; river of life and ripples of change activity
Observation of the return volunteer event attended by 70 return volunteers
Survey sent to 70 volunteers with a response rate of 43% (30)
Document review including strategic documents, 55 Action at Home reports and ICS national volunteer Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP)2 survey analysis

The lead researcher conducted the interviews, observation and document review. There was a plan for some of the interviews to be carried out by a member of the programme staff which could have enhanced the data collection process but this was not possible during the period of the fieldwork. A research team worked collectively on the four participatory workshops which ran simultaneously and were repeated three times on the same day. The team comprised a Return Volunteer, a Senior Programme Manager and two members of the Impact and Accountability team. Each team member facilitated a workshop and was involved in an analytical debrief session with the lead researcher. Emerging findings were then presented to the staff team at the end of the fieldwork for validation and testing.

Due to time limitations the study did not include any face-to-face work with volunteers who had not completed their Action at Home or had dropped out of the programme, and also did not include any interviews with external stakeholders. It would have been useful to explore the perspectives of these groups as they may have offered an alternative viewpoint.



Ripples of change activity

4. Findings

4.1 What does active citizenship mean to young people?

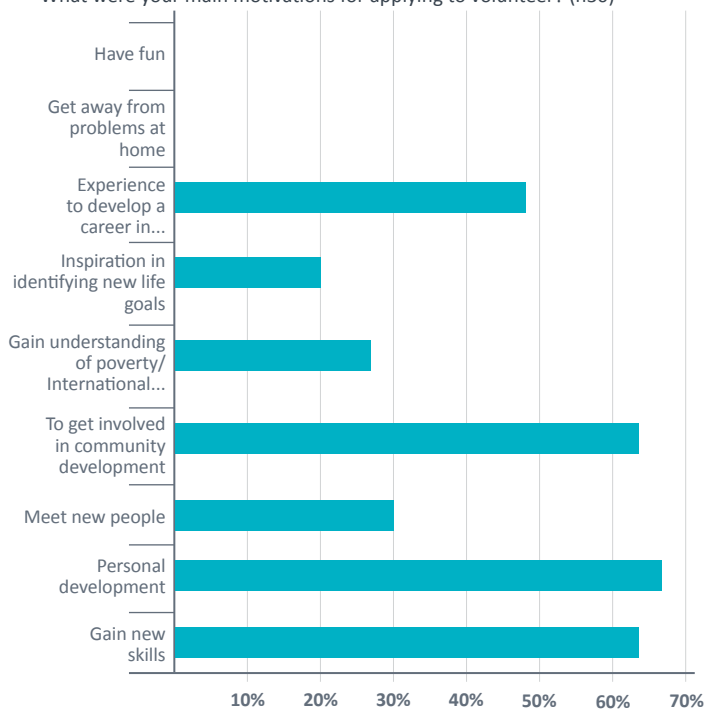
Participants felt that the term ‘active citizenship’ had a number of meanings and their descriptions focused mainly on action rather than status. They said it is about building a better society, improving lives, making a positive contribution, giving back to the local community, being aware, and taking action.

Some felt that the key factor for active citizenship was having impact and a voice. One participant felt it was about not expecting things to be done for you. Responses on the meaning of active citizenship focused strongly on taking action, influencing others, awareness of rights and campaigning, and less on changes in behaviour and attitudes. This does not mean that participants themselves had not experienced attitude and behaviour change, but rather that they did not articulate this as strongly within their understanding of ‘active citizenship’.

All participants were familiar with the term but many said they had only come across it through their ICS and VSO experience and that it would not be a term in common use amongst their peers. Some said that their friends and family would understand the sentiment of the term but this was generally as a result of conversations that the volunteers had with friends and family after their ICS placement. Almost all said that active citizenship is not a term that their friends, family and peers would use.

Chart 1: Volunteer motivations

What were your main motivations for applying to volunteer? (n30)



4.2 How and when does youth volunteering generate active citizenship?

A high proportion of survey respondents said that they had been involved in some form of voluntary activity prior to their placement. All said that they had carried out some unpaid support to someone in their community. For example, 72% had volunteered for a local community organisation. Of the volunteers who took part in the interviews, a half said that they had been involved in some form of voluntary activities before their placement and all agreed that their enthusiasm for volunteering had been significantly enhanced by their placement experience. They said that that this enthusiasm was triggered by the direct experience of fieldwork and, in particular, interaction with the communities in which they were based.

“Active citizenship is every individual citizen trying to understand their rights and entitlements and the rights of people in general and playing an active role in the realisation of these rights.”- Volunteer



Volunteers use artwork to express their understanding of active citizenship

“An active citizen is a receiver of life changing ideas who is willing and ready to put it to play in his or her life for the good of the nation at large.”- Volunteer

Participants responding to the survey identified their main motivations for applying to volunteer as personal development, gaining new skills, becoming involved in community development and interest in developing a career in international development. It can also be seen that a desire to be involved in community and international development are closely linked to the concept of active citizenship illustrated below.:



Volunteers at participatory workshop (Photo credit: Janet Clark)

For those taking part in the face-to-face interviews, personal development and the opportunity to gain new skills were the main motivations for joining the ICS programme. Unlike the survey respondents, they did not focus solely on a desire to become involved in community development or international development as a significant number also said that the opportunity of exposure to cross-cultural working was a major incentive. They felt that it would be interesting to work with young people from a different culture and some said that they had become more tolerant and open-minded as a result of their experience

“I learnt to be open minded and I also learnt not to wait to be told to do things.” - Volunteer

“It was an experience outside where I am normally based; the idea of meeting people from Britain and working with them and meeting people from other parts of this country.” - Volunteer

Interview participants were able to describe how their placement had enabled them to achieve some of the objectives that had initially motivated them to volunteer. Despite being an important outcome for individuals, the desire to become an active citizen was an even more powerful outcome for many. This was often not a consideration or expected outcome for the young people at the outset as they were much more focused in their own self development and opportunity to gain skills.

“Before ICS I never thought I would have a passion for volunteering. When I got home I went to the person who recommended ICS to me to find something else to do.” - Volunteer

Participants also described how their placement had given them a different perspective on volunteering, as well as ideas and impetus for carrying this forward after their placement.

The ICS placement gave me a different direction and a wider approach to volunteering... and structure.” - Volunteer

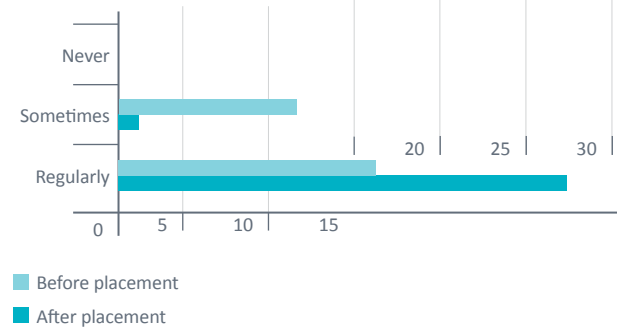
“I learnt a lot about myself... I was just fresh from school. I learnt independence and I learnt to take charge. I didn't know I had it in me. I learnt about the problems in the community... in Nigeria people think it is the government's responsibility to do everything and blame the government for everything and never actually take steps to change things. This was a big lesson for me.” - Volunteer

Many young people on the ICS programme said that they had been shocked and surprised by things they had experienced on their placement. Exposure to the effects of poverty and the opportunity to make an impact, even in a small way, was a significant catalyst for generating a desire for active citizenship beyond their placement.

Survey participants were asked if they ever discussed economic, social or environmental issues facing their local area with friends, family or colleagues before and after their placement. Chart 2 shows that whilst almost half of respondents had such discussions sometimes prior to their placement, there was a significant increase in the numbers who regularly had these discussions after their placement:

Chart 2: Awareness of economic, social and environmental issues before and after placement

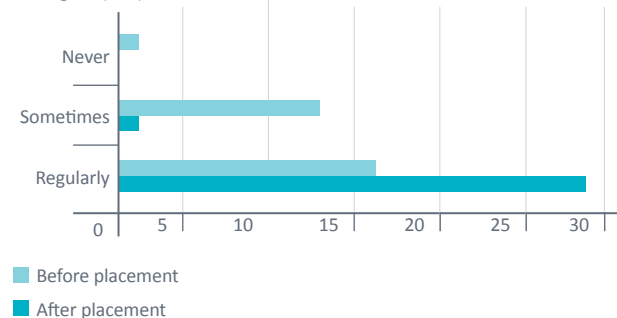
Discuss economic or social or environmental issues facing local area with friends, family or colleagues (n30)



Similarly, survey participants were asked if they ever discussed global development issues with friends, family or colleagues. Chart 3 shows that most had discussed these issues sometimes, and over half had held these discussions regularly prior to their placement. Of these, there was a significant increase in the numbers who regularly talked about global development issues after placement:

Chart 3: Awareness of global development issues before and after placement

Talk about global development issues with friends, family or colleagues (n30)



“The level of poverty exposed me to something I had never seen before. I was shocked to see that rural people don't like farming. I could see that the women were abused. It was sad to see that kind of thing.” - Volunteer

“When you go to your community the first thing they see is that you are coming with money. This is difficult.” - Volunteer

4.3 What factors enable/prevent active citizenship resulting from youth volunteering?

Challenges

Participants identified a number of challenges that they had experienced when carrying out Action at Home, and identified these as challenges to active citizenship. As many of the participants had recently completed their Action at Home projects, their focus during the interview was very much on the challenges that they had experienced during this process. A number of participants were able to talk about the challenges that they had experienced with activities beyond their Action at Home which tended to be specific projects or ongoing volunteering activities. Some challenges were linked to resources and others were driven by personal, community level or national level factors.

Some participants talked about having difficulty in accessing small scale funds which they felt they needed to support their plans for active citizenship (e.g. money to print flyers to promote an event). Others talked about not being able to access non-monitory resources such as expertise or access to an identity card which they said is sometimes a requirement when trying to gain appointments with those in positions of power.

“Not having people share your vision is the hardest thing.”
- Volunteer

At a personal level, a number of participants said that they were under pressure from their families to find paid employment. Some said that they felt isolated when they were carrying out their Action at Home after their placement, whilst others worked with peers from their placement to carry out their projects. Some talked about a fear of failure or fear of stepping beyond their comfort zone while other participants talked about how difficult they had found it when they had experienced rejection. In some cases this was about having ideas rejected and others had not been able to talk to the stakeholders they were trying to influence. Others said that they had struggled to find motivation or self belief, and a number mentioned that they found it difficult to find time to carry out activities

At a community level, many participants said that the community in which they were carrying out their Action at Home did not understand their vision or motivation. They described a lack of understanding of the concept of volunteering and this could make it difficult to build trust and could result in an Action at Home project not being well received.

“The concept of volunteering is not widely known in this part of the world so people need convincing... they don't get it. It can be less motivating when you see people around you who don't want the same thing as you.” - Volunteer



Volunteers use artwork to express their understanding of active citizenship

“When I heard about YAN I thought this is exactly what I need. To have a group of young people who have the same vision and keep each other connected and motivated. Young people who can brainstorm and share ideas. I think it's going to be great “
- Volunteer

At a national level, some participants highlighted government policies which were working against their objectives. Others talked about bureaucracy creating barriers to their Action at Home and some said that local security issues had been a challenge.

“We need to be realistic about what YAN can achieve. It needs to come from the spirit of young people and what they want to achieve.” - VSO staff member



Return volunteer event

Enablers

Many said that they gained a feeling of fulfilment from being part of a change process and seeing the impact that the change had on the people they were working with. This motivated them to continue being active citizens after their volunteer placement. Receiving a positive response from communities was an incentive but positive reactions from family were also important. Many valued the celebratory approach adopted by VSO in recognising the achievements of volunteers and providing opportunities for volunteers to come together through events that helped to generate enthusiasm for young people. Many participants said that they felt the Youth Action Network (YAN) had the potential to offer significant support to volunteers through regional networks. Some stakeholders stressed the importance of taking a realistic approach to setting up YAN

Strong brand recognition of VSO and ICS in the community was also seen as beneficial in promoting and supporting activities for some of the participants. Many talked about personal development and learning opportunities which increased their self confidence. This in turn motivated and equipped them to continue being active after their placement.

Respondents highlighted that their experience of team work, support and mentorship from peers was a significant factor to support continuing action. Some participants had a vision for their future that had been inspired by their placement experience. They described being motivated to take steps towards their future aspirations. One person said that peer pressure from being amongst other volunteers acted as a significant driver for her to continue being an active citizen

4.4 How and when do youth return volunteers continue as active citizens?

In answering this question the research tools explored the role played by Action at Home and YAN in fostering active citizenship. Participants talked about numerous skills that they had acquired from their placement which had directly helped them to undertake Action at Home. The skills described by participants offer a solid foundation to support active citizenship and many had gone on to use and develop these skills in activities beyond their Action at Home.

Figure 4: Wordle analysis of learning from placement (most frequently used words are represented through larger font)



All participants who had completed an Action at Home said that it gave them a focus and incentive to be active citizens after their placement. Others said that they would have taken action with or without the requirement to complete Action at Home. Those participants from the NGVP/NYSC programmes were not required to undertake Action at Home but had all carried on being active and had produced reports on their action when requested. Staff felt that the Action at Home reports were variable in quality and consideration needs to be given as to their purpose and structure.

A large number of participants had gone on to undertake action after their required Action at Home report had been completed. Many continued to describe these additional actions as action at home. For many seeing the impact of action from their Action at Home was a significant motivator towards active citizenship.

Table 2 below shows the range of activities that were carried out by volunteers in their Action at Home. Many of the volunteers opted to carry out a project which was linked either directly or indirectly to their placement. Some carried on working in their placement community whilst others used thematic learning from their placement to apply elsewhere:

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Rivers of life activity

Table 2: Breakdown of Action at Home activity

Action at Home activity	Number
Action against Ebola	1
Awareness, Sensitisation & Sanitation	1
Campaign on Volunteering	1
Child Neglect Campaign	1
Child Rights Sensitisation	1
Continuation of placement project	2
Education	6
Education and Secure Livelihood Project	3
Empowerment	2
Entrepreneurship awareness	2
Hand washing	3
Health	3
HIV/AIDS Awareness	2
Personal hygiene awareness	2
Poverty and Sustainable Development: Sensitisation	1
Project CAP – Cognitive, Aptitude and Psychomotor	3
Project CRIC - Choose the Right Career	1
Radio Programme and Motivational Talk on Teenage Pregnancy	1
Reducing Road Accidents	1
School Construction	1
Secure Livelihoods	5
Seminar tagged Youth Participation in my Community	1
Skills Training	3
Summer Camp	1
Volunteering	1
Women empowerment on livelihood	1
YOUTH ACTION	2
Youth Education and Empowerment	3
Youth Participation in Governance	4
Youth Sensitisation	1

The survey asked what social action participants were involved with both before and after their placement. Chart 4 below shows that there was an increase in almost all activities after the placement. The only activities that had not increased were voting in election or participating in a public demonstration. As there has not been a recent election in Nigeria, these were not expected to increase post-placement.

“YAN is return volunteers coming together... to build the connection of youth. Coming together to see the bigger picture and then going home and seeing what you can do within yourself. YAN will support with that.” - Volunteer

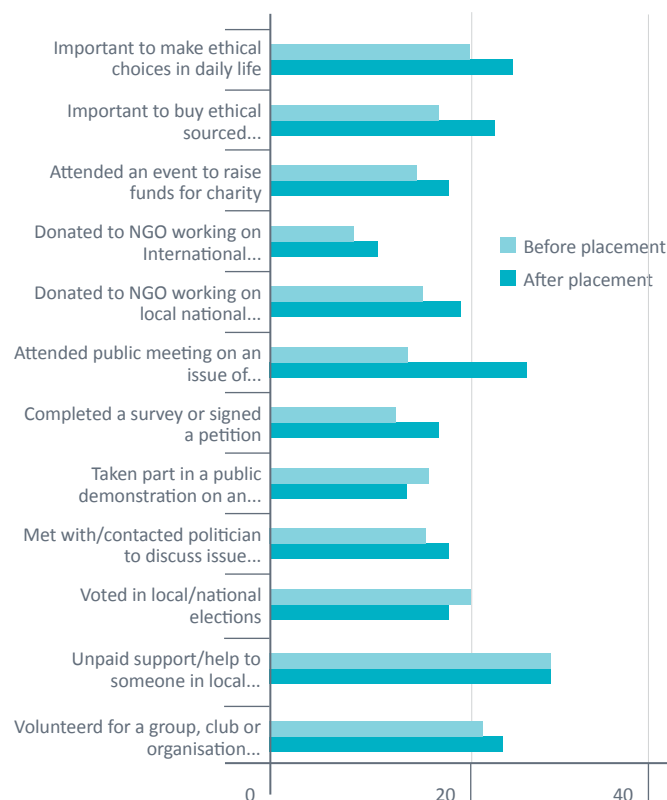
Interview and focus group participants said that the energy and enthusiasm to be an active citizen was easier to maintain when young people were receiving support from other volunteers or friends and family. Recognition was also a motivating factor and many described that their parents were very proud of them because of their actions. Some participants had also gone on to receive requests to speak at public meetings.

Participants were asked if they had future plans for action. Some participants had realistic ideas and were able to describe the next steps that they would take. Often this involved rolling out or

expanding activities from their Action at Home. Others had ideas for action but they were unsure about how to move forward. In some cases, the ideas were very ambitious but not focused or realistic and they were not able to identify their next steps.

Chart 4: Experience of volunteering and social action before placement

Experience of volunteering and social action before placement (n29)



Participant needs were informed by participants’ experiences and challenges of undertaking Action at Home and beyond this. Their ideas are listed in the adjacent text box and encompass support, resource sharing, leadership, learning and collaboration. The YAN (Youth Action Nigeria) network is currently in development so it is too early to begin to identify any evidence of how it has contributed to fostering active citizenship. Participants did however articulate a range of needs to support them in their action.

The YAN network has the potential to begin to address some of these needs and fill a range of support gaps to promote and encourage active citizenship amongst return volunteers in empowering young volunteers to play a leadership role in taking the network forward.

Participants identified needs to support active citizenship:

- Support and motivation
- Sharing ideas
- Role models and mentorship
- Platform for opinion and ideas
- Test ideas for action
- Draw on knowledge and experience
- Scale up action
- Encourage youth leadership
- Training opportunities
- Collaboration across programmes
- Access to identity cards

4.5 What factors enable/prevent active citizenship resulting from youth volunteering?

All interview participants were able to describe benefits that they had experienced personally as a result of becoming an active citizen through their placement, Action at Home and beyond this. These benefits include:

- New skills learnt
- Increased knowledge
- Personal development
- Changes in attitude
- Increased creativity
- Increased independence
- Greater resilience
- Cultural awareness and tolerance.

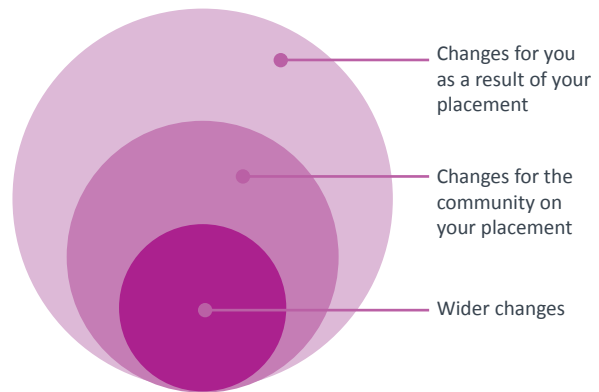
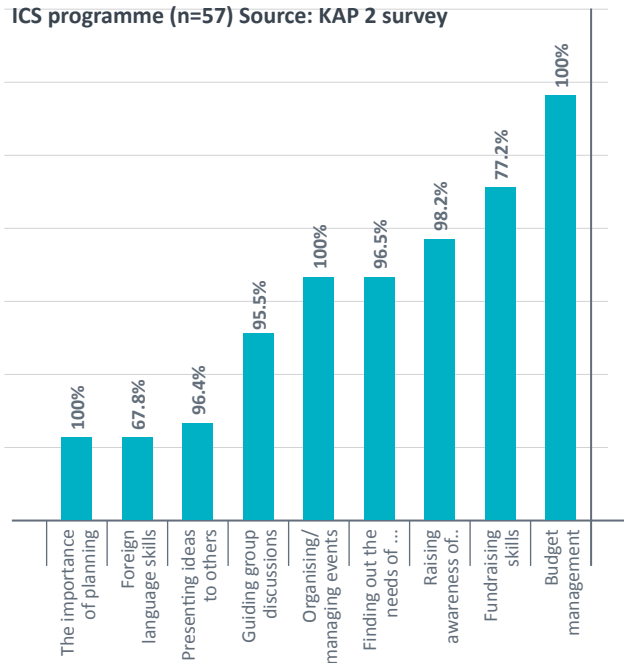
Increased self confidence and overcoming shyness was one of the most frequently mentioned benefits of the placement that has enabled participants to take steps toward active citizenship.

Results of the KAP 2 survey shown in chart 5 below is data collected through the ICS standard monitoring system and shows volunteer perceptions of the skills developed though participation in the ICS programme:

“My communication skills are much better and I can relate to people. That’s what organisations [employers] are looking for.” - Volunteer

Chart 5: KAP2 survey of ICV perception of skills developed through participation in ICS

ICV perception of skills developed through participation in the ICS programme (n=57) Source: KAP 2 survey



Some participants were able to describe how the skills and confidence acquired through their placement had helped them in other areas of their lives such as confidence at job interviews or being able to set up their own businesses.

Participants were able to describe some of the outcomes of their activities with the communities in which they have been active. They included improved attendance in schools, small scale improvement in literacy for individuals, improved health or education facilities, acquisition of skills and increased awareness. These outcomes were often perceived by the individual but were not based on information from those within the community. Some participants had gone back to visit the community and were able to describe changes. A small number had tried to systematically gather evidence of the impact of their action but few had thought about doing this.

At this stage it is challenging for the volunteers to see evidence of impact at a level beyond the community. Yet, there is significant potential for this impact and civil society can benefit from grass roots influence.

It was also felt by VSO staff that the promotion of active citizenship amongst youth has the potential to divert some young people away from violence and extremism.

Example of impact

A participant described how she had completed computer skills training with unemployed youth and secured four computers so that they could continue to train others for her Action at Home. One of those trained has gone on to set up a cyber cafe and now earns an income to support his family.



River of life

5. Conclusion

VSO Nigeria has taken a holistic youth-focused approach to programming with ICS playing a significant role. There is a strong vision which focuses on the potential of the large youth population in Nigeria (70%) to begin to make changes to alleviate poverty. This backdrop provides a strong foundation to support youth volunteering and active citizenship. Youth volunteer placements can act as a powerful catalyst for active citizenship. In Nigeria this drive has gained momentum through a number of routes; all of which have played an important role in developing and nurturing active citizenship:

- **Celebration and recognition of success:** At a return volunteer event observed as part of this case study, awards were made and those receiving the awards had the opportunity to produce and showcase a video of their work. Winners also received a cheque to support future action.
- **Enthusiasm and support:** Programme staff were very strong in this area and acted as a source of motivation for volunteers.
- **Networking:** Opportunities to meet and network with other volunteers were considered very valuable. Participants talked about conversations that they had during the event which they had found useful for sharing ideas, knowledge and materials. Some particularly valued the opportunity to meet volunteers from other programmes.
- **Active roles:** Opportunities to play an active role in the office provided a significant opportunity for volunteers to learn new skills, take responsibilities and gain experience which they felt would be useful for their future careers. These individuals can also make a significant contribution to the work undertaken by VSO.
- **Working together:** Young people felt that this was a motivating factor which made Action at Home or beyond more stimulating as well as easier to achieve. Not all volunteers had had this opportunity as some had undertaken action on their own. In some cases they felt that this had been isolating and hard to maintain momentum.
- **Social Media:** The use of social media to promote and network was highlighted as being an important part of VSO Nigeria's approach in sharing information and to encourage communication between volunteers.
- **Brand recognition:** The strength of VSO's brand was highlighted as being influential in opening doors for young volunteers and supporting their action. Some said that they would value identity cards linking them to VSO or YAN to help them in their work as active citizens.
- **Developing Youth Action Nigeria (YAN):** This is of significant importance as it offers the opportunity to build a geographically dispersed network and infrastructure for support, collaboration and learning. Establishing a YAN network will also increase the leadership role of young people in taking VSO Nigeria's national vision for youth forward.

6. Recommendations

- The term 'return volunteer' used within ICS programmes does not capture the spirit of ongoing active citizenship. During the course of the research, the term 'life time volunteer' was suggested and embraced by all those involved as it was considered to be a better reflection of a shared vision for fostering active citizenship.
- There needs to be critical thinking as to the structure and purpose of the Action at Home report as the quality is variable, and whilst it acted as a trigger for social action for some volunteers, others felt that it did not significantly encourage them to carry out an Action at Home project as they were motivated without it. It was also felt that the term could be renamed as 'Action in Community' to better reflect the global south perspective.
- Youth Action Nigeria (YAN) has the potential to play a significant role in supporting young volunteers in their Action at Home and beyond across a broader geographical area. Many of the challenges young volunteers described with their Action at Home could potentially be supported by YAN including increased collaboration, mentorship, learning and support with ideas, knowledge and motivation. Future programmes should consider mechanisms for supporting volunteers with their Action at Home and beyond. It will be important for programmes to test the level of leadership and control volunteers want to take as placing young people in a central leadership role within the YAN network will be critical to its success.
- Some volunteers were struggling to identify clear and realistic avenues for active citizenship after their Action at Home. There are opportunities here for VSO to link volunteers to existing programmes and structures within and outside VSO. Embedding ICS programmes into existing programmes creates an integrated approach and strengthens youth programming. It also provides a significant opportunity for engaging and directing ongoing active citizenship. As well as opportunities for involvement within VSO programmes there is potential to collaborate with partners and other local NGOs to build opportunities for action. Therefore, future programmes should consider mechanisms for harnessing the potential and enthusiasm of volunteers.
- Many participants appeared to be from families that are less directly affected by poverty. This was reflected in comments about being surprised by a range of aspects of poverty that were encountered during their placement. This acted as a significant catalyst for many of the volunteers and influenced their decisions to carry out action after their placement. Future programmes should consider how to create opportunities to recruit young people from less privileged backgrounds who are unlikely to be influenced by exposure to poverty in this way. There is also a factor that less privileged youth are not as secure or confident as they are struggling to explore livelihood options and jobs rather than focusing on volunteering. Compared to those from more affluent backgrounds, reaching these young people is a greater challenge and one that should not be considered as a starting point for youth volunteering programmes but rather a consideration for programmes as they evolve
- Volunteers felt that they had made a difference during their placement or Action at Home based on their own perceptions. Some had revisited the communities that they worked in during their placement but few could describe if the action that they had taken had made a difference. Future programmes need to encourage volunteers to seek feedback and gather evidence from those they work with to understand if there has been a positive change from their interventions.



Volunteers use artwork to express their understanding of active citizenship

Table 3: Summary of recommendations for future programmes

1	The term “return volunteer” used within ICS programmes does not capture the spirit of ongoing active citizenship. The term “life time volunteer” was considered to be a better reflection of a shared vision for fostering active citizenship.
2	There needs to be critical thinking as to the structure and purpose of the Action at Home report and it was also felt that the term “Action at Home” could be renamed to be “Action at Community” to better reflect the global south perspective.
3	Future programmes should consider mechanisms for supporting volunteers with their Action at Home and beyond. It will be important for programmes to test with young volunteers the shape and structure of this support.
4	Embedding ICS programmes into existing programmes creates an integrated approach and strengthens youth programming and provides a significant opportunity for engaging and directing ongoing active citizenship. Future programmes should consider mechanisms for harnessing the potential and enthusiasm of volunteers.
5	Future programmes should consider how to create opportunities to recruit young people from less privileged backgrounds.
6	Future programmes need to encourage volunteers to seek feedback and gather evidence from those they work with to understand if there has been a positive change from their interventions.

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



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