# Education evaluation: meta-analysis

[VSO, December 2014]

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Acronyms

CPD         Continuing Professional Development
CTE         College of Teacher Education
DFID        Department for International Development
ECE         Early Childhood Education
ELIP        English Language Improvement Programme
HDP         Higher Diploma Programme
ICT         Information and Communication Technology
INEE        International Network for Education in Emergencies
M&E         Monitoring and Evaluation
MoE         Ministry of Education
MoEVMT      Ministry of Education and Vocational Training
OECD        Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMLT        Partnership Monitoring and Learning Tool
PTA         Parent Teacher Association
TC          Teacher Centre
ToC         Theory of Change
VfM         Value for Money
VSO-E       VSO Ethiopia
WEO         Woreda Education Offices
ZEO         Zonal Education Offices
Executive summary

The purpose of this evaluation is to help VSO make progress in its global education work through a meta-analysis. It draws on the experience of conducting county-specific evaluations of VSO’s education programmes in Ethiopia and Zanzibar, utilising the key lessons and emerging themes from each location that are of relevance for VSO more broadly. Specifically the focus is to assist in the development of evidence-based strategy, improve the specific programmatic approach, and refine the overarching Theory of Change within the organisation’s education work.

The research activities in country were designed to ensure that, within the limited time available, a wide range of perspectives were included within the evaluation. The evaluations utilised a mixed methods approach, triangulating data wherever possible. During the field visits, the research team interacted in person with 176 individuals involved in the programmes. The analysis and recommendations are integrated together and presented as five topic-specific sections.

The first section focuses on the necessary and on-going transition from a placement to programme-based approach. VSO undertook a significant amount of work in 2009 and 2010 to increase the linkage between VSO international and the country level in relation to education programmes. Many countries revised their country strategies and were encouraged to adopt a more holistic approach, moving from individual placements to ongoing programmes. However it is clear that the transition is not simple, requires a significant input of time and energy, and has not yet taken place in all contexts. The report recommends reviewing the way in which VSO engages with volunteers at an international and country-specific level, the way in which VSO country offices engage with partner organisations, and the way in which VSO international engages with VSO country offices.

The second section focuses on the effectiveness of the VSO teacher training models, specifically the VSO tripartite approach to education and different approaches to training. It explores the different approaches to teacher training and the effectiveness of each, drawing links with recognised good practice from elsewhere. There are clear challenges in instigating widespread change with limited capacity. However VSO has been effective in working directly with teachers, and in long term capacity building of key stakeholders within education systems at regional and national levels. The report then focuses on the education governance that VSO provides, noting the importance of securing buy-in from school leadership and long term integration with education ministries.

The third section focuses on the outcomes and possible long-term impacts of VSO’s work, addressing the extent to which VSO’s programmes improve the capacity of teachers and create better teaching and learning environments and outcomes for students. It is not currently possible to give definitive, quantitative input regarding the outcomes-based efficacy of VSO’s education work. The primary reason for this is the challenge of reliable, systematic data collection. Analysis of anecdotal evidence from education programmes in Ethiopia and Zanzibar demonstrates that there are notable outcomes following some VSO interventions, but that these outcomes vary between institutions and volunteers. This section of the report closes by identifying the ways in which improvements can be made to VSO’s approach to M&E and systematic learning in education programmes.

The fourth section focuses on the sustainability of placing skilled education volunteers in education institutions in order to increase teacher effectiveness. It focuses how to improve the sustainability of programmes on both an operational and financial basis. It highlights the need for improving the procedures for ensuring continuity between in-coming and out-going volunteers and the direct impact that this will have on programme effectiveness. It then engages with the issue of VSO’s branding and visibility, identifying the issues and implications
of different routes forward for the organisation. Building on this, it then considers how VSO can build increasingly strategic and effective partnerships to maximise its positive educational impact.

The fifth section provides an analysis of the VSO Theory of Change and offers recommendations regarding its future development. These include specific input regarding the ToC diagram, and reflections regarding the way in which the ToC can become a more effective tool.

The report concludes by offering summary recommendations on areas that VSO should prioritise in order to maximise effectiveness in its education programmes.
1. **Introduction**

The purpose of this evaluation is to help VSO make progress in its overall education work. It draws on the experience of conducting county-specific evaluations of VSO’s education programmes in Ethiopia and Zanzibar. The intention is not to provide a detailed comparison between the two contexts. Instead it is to draw on the key lessons and emerging themes from each location that are of relevance for VSO more widely in efforts to improve its education work, specific programmatic approach, and overarching Theory of Change.

2. **Objectives**

The objective of this evaluation is to understand how VSO can operate most effectively in its education programmes in order to contribute to the development of evidence-based strategy and practice. Within this, the evaluation assesses:

- where and how VSO can add most value in improving teacher effectiveness (drawing on the lessons learned from Ethiopia and Zanzibar and assessing the different models)
- what makes the programme work and why it works more or less effectively (including the validity of the VSO tripartite theory)
- the current and future challenges that VSO are facing in improving teacher effectiveness (and offering routes forward that capitalize on strengths, minimize drawbacks, and maximize sustainability)
- the specific implications for the development of the Theory of Change (exploring the extent to which it reflects what is happening in the programme and how it can be enhanced from the bottom-up)
- the ways in which the VSO head office can assist with the identified challenges

The four following points were provided by VSO in the ToR and have been instrumental in guiding the research activities and report structure.

1. The evaluation will test a set of key assumptions about VSO’s work and interventions in teacher training, namely that it is welcomed and valued by our partner organisations and the teachers in country themselves, that it directly contributes towards improving the learning outcomes of children, that it is sustainable in terms of longer term impact and that it is worthy of replication and scale up as an education system strengthening approach. The evaluation will seek to provide evidence that either supports or challenges these traditionally held organizational assumptions.

2. The findings will inform VSOs approaches to improving teacher effectiveness in Ethiopia and Zanzibar as well as other education programmes with a focus on teacher training resulting in increased impact and improved learning outcomes for children.

3. The findings will be used to inform the ongoing development of a Theory of Change for VSO’s education work, and contribute to a global evidence base examining the contribution volunteers make to development. This work is being led by advisors across VSOs Strategy and Programme Effectiveness Group.

4. The findings will be fed into the ex-post Independent Progress Review that will be carried out on VSO’s Strategic Grant Agreement with DFID, due summer 2014.
3. Context

3.1 Summary of Ethiopia evaluation

Context
The country-specific evaluation of VSO’s education programme in Ethiopia was conducted in October 2014. The evaluation focused on VSO-Ethiopia’s (VSO-E) approach to teacher training and teaching governance. It examined how VSO-E contributes to improving teaching in the Colleges of Teacher Education (CTE) and the impact of improved teaching and learning practices on teachers and students. It also analysed the strengths and weaknesses of VSO’s volunteer model for education and provided recommendations for the future.

Programme overview
The VSO-E education programmes were designed in consultation with the MoE and aim to improve teacher effectiveness in Ethiopia. The Programme Area Plan 2010-14 sets out the aims, approaches and activities of VSO’s education work. Since 2010, VSO-E has worked primarily through the 31 CTEs to give training to teacher educators, and support improved teaching practices for pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. There are five main programmes: Higher Diploma Programme (HDP); Continuing Professional Development (CPD); Information and Communications Technology (ICT); English Language Improvement Programme (ELIP) and Early Childhood Education (ECE).

Analysis
The impact of volunteers’ work in Ethiopia is dependent on the expertise of the volunteer, the relationships that they are able to form with their colleagues, and the level of support from CTE leadership. There is anecdotal evidence of the impact of the training on teacher educators and, to a lesser extent, on teachers themselves. However, VSO-E lacks a regular monitoring system that would enable volunteers or staff to collect more robust data on the strengths, impacts and outcomes of its programmes.

VSO has a long-standing and close relationship with the MoE. This has been a key factor in the successful uptake of VSO-E’s other work (the HDP course, for example, has been implemented in all 31 of the CTEs) and in giving legitimacy to volunteers based in the CTEs. Volunteers in the MoE are involved in developing policy, implementing curriculums and programmes, and conducting joint visits with MoE officials. They are most effective where they can see the impact and challenges of VSO’s CTE and school-level interventions and apply this knowledge to inform policy.

VSO-E’s training courses contain many elements of best-practice teacher training, most notably long-term training programmes that model teaching methods and behaviours. The most marked impact of VSO’s engagement in CTEs and Universities is in attitude change. Teacher educators recognise the benefits and value of student-centred learning and try to apply them. However, VSO’s teaching and learning courses often involve passing on relatively complex new ideas regarding pedagogy approaches. The research team observed that, after the courses finish, many teacher educators continue to rely largely on old methods and the cascade impact on teachers and students is minimal. The impact on CTEs is more pronounced among those with consistent investment from consecutive volunteers.

VSO-E’s new project-based approach of working directly with teachers will address the limited trickle-down of the current practices. There are several impressive examples of direct interventions at a school level. These case studies illustrate greatest impact where multiple teachers are receiving training, there is support from school leadership, and schools provide ongoing support and development to teachers.
Recommendations

The seven recommendations focused on the specific elements of the analysis that can be applied from the evaluation to the future of the programme:

- Improve support to volunteers, especially in remote locations
- Increase dialogue with partners before and during a volunteer placement
- Increase geographical focus
- Simplify the content of student-centred learning courses
- Work directly with teachers, head teachers, and local level government
- Ensure policy volunteers have practical in-school experience
- Focus on strengthening project management, monitoring and evaluation

[For more detail please refer to the full evaluation report of VSO’s education programme in Ethiopia.]

3.2 Summary of Zanzibar evaluation

Context

The country-specific evaluation of VSO’s education programme in Zanzibar (Unguja and Pemba) was conducted in October 2014. The evaluation focused on VSO’s approach to teacher training and examined how VSO contributes to improving teacher effectiveness and learning outcomes for students. It also documented the strengths and weaknesses of VSO’s work and provided practical recommendations for the future of the education programme.

Programme overview

The VSO education work in Zanzibar is called the ‘School Improvement Project’ or the ‘Zanzibar School Bill Project’ and is one part of the overall education programme of VSO Tanzania. VSO work in close partnership with the MoEVT in Zanzibar. The current programme started in May 2013, based on the cumulative learning from all the previous activities.

The programme currently works with 112 schools in Unguja (both primary and secondary) and 8 in Pemba (all primary schools). Many of the schools in Unguja are in the early stages of involvement with the programme and have not yet received significant support. The VSO volunteers have two roles: teaching skills facilitator (working primarily with the teachers) and leadership facilitator.

Analysis

The effectiveness of the VSO teacher training model is dependent on the skill and commitment of the volunteer. Although significant progress has been made away from a solely placement focus, the effectiveness of VSO activities is still largely defined by the individual volunteer. There is evidence that the approach used in Zanzibar has contributed to improved management of schools in a range of ways. There is also evidence that the VSO approach has contributed to improved classroom practices by teachers. There is some anecdotal evidence that the model used in Zanzibar has contributed to improved learning experiences for children. There was no evidence that the model used in Zanzibar has contributed directly to improved academic pass rates for student teachers or reduced attrition rate of student teachers. The approach of working through TCs is largely positive as it is integrated with the MoEVT and does not seek to establish a parallel system of teacher training. However, one of the consequences of being integrated within a conservative teacher training system is the slow pace of change that can take place.

It is difficult to determine the quantitative outcomes of the programme because of the lack of
appropriate integrated data collection procedures within the programme. There are improvements being made by the programme team in regard to long term testing and establishing of baselines to determine change in performance over time. However, none of the current measures are reliable enough to be confident in claiming causality for any change that occurs. The ongoing sustainability of the programme was identified by several volunteers as the most significant challenge faced. This is indicative of the transition phase that VSO is currently in, moving from placements to programmes. In order to ensure continuity there will need to be a shift in the way the placing of new VSO volunteers is conceptualized, undertaken and supported. One additional feature of the field visit was the high calibre of the four VSO volunteers that were present in Zanzibar at the time of the visit. All of the ministry officials that the research team interacted with were highly positive about VSO and the role of the volunteers.

Recommendations

The six recommendations focused on the specific elements of the analysis that can be applied from the evaluation to the future of the programme:

- Prioritise the development of systematic learning and reporting across the programme
- Ensure continuity between volunteers and strategic planning regarding succession
- Improve the support to volunteers, especially those in more remote locations
- Define programme purpose and activities with a greater degree of clarity
- Be proactive in selecting future partners
- Utilise influence with government to contribute to system-level change

[For more detail please refer to the full evaluation report of VSO’s education programme in Zanzibar.]

4. Methodology

Context

The evaluations in both countries were based on the guidance given by VSO in the ToR. The methodology was based on internationally accepted guidance on methodological structure from OECD-DAC, evaluating relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The research activities in country were designed to ensure that, within the limited time available, a wide range of perspectives were included within the evaluation.

Summary of activities

The evaluations utilised a mixed methods approach, triangulating data wherever possible. During the field visits, the research team interacted in person with 176 individuals involved in the programmes. The interviews and focus groups followed a flexible semi-structured approach, tailored to the needs of each stakeholder group and responsive to the different needs and priorities encountered. In addition, the research team conducted a document review, a review of relevant PMLTs from Ethiopia and Zanzibar, and an online survey of current and former volunteers in both countries from 2010-2014.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Number in Ethiopia</th>
<th>Number in Zanzibar</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
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Parameters

- Budgetary constraints meant that it was only possible to spend a short amount of time in each country. The primary purpose of the visits was to help inform the overall VSO model, ToC and strategy. It was not possible to capture the full diversity of activities that VSO are undertaking within the time available for the visits.

- The meta-analysis is based on observations from VSO’s education work in two countries. The programmes in these countries are not necessarily fully representative of VSO’s broader work and the analysis should therefore be read with this in mind.

- The wide range of activities that have been undertaken within VSO’s education work in the research countries, combined with the lack of reliable baseline data, meant that it was not possible to demonstrate quantitative impact of the programme on learning outcomes.

- This report is focused on the overall approach that VSO adopts in education. It therefore does not have a significant focus on the role and concerns of the individual

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<th>Current Volunteers</th>
<th>Former Volunteers</th>
<th>Total Number of Individuals</th>
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<td>Interview with VSO volunteers and prog. team</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ind. interviews with heads</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus groups with heads and teacher educators</td>
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<td>4 (16 participants)</td>
<td>4 (16 participants)</td>
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<td>Interviews and focus groups with programme coordinators</td>
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<td>Focus groups with teacher educators</td>
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<td>3 (8 participants)</td>
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<td>3 (15 participants)</td>
<td>6 (28 participants)</td>
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volunteers. Despite this, the volunteers are of major importance and their perspectives have a central position within the country reports that accompany this meta-analysis report.

5. Analysis and recommendations

The analysis and recommendations are integrated together and presented section by section. The central focus is on recommendations for VSO, and a more detailed analysis of related themes is provided in each of the country reports.

5.1 Programme design – placements to programmes

VSO undertook a significant amount of work in 2009 and 2010 to increase the linkage between VSO international and the country level in relation to education programmes. Many countries revised their country strategies and were encouraged to adopt a more holistic approach, moving from individual placements to ongoing programmes. However it is clear that the transition is not simple, requires a significant input of time and energy, and has not yet taken place in all contexts. In the past VSO worked by placing volunteers with partner organisations. There was limited need for feedback aside from affirmation from the partner that the volunteer was working effectively: the accountability was primarily to the partner rather than to a donor. Now there is a need for targets, clear activities and unified indicators in order to engage with donors effectively. This is clearly a difficult transition to make and it will continue to require a significant input of time and resource. This investment needs to take place in the way VSO engages with volunteers, with partner organisations, and with country offices:

- The way in which VSO, at an international and country-specific level, communicates and engages with volunteers. With the decrease in flexibility for the volunteers it is necessary to work hard to communicate expectations at the outset (from VSO international and the country offices). This is especially the case with re-volunteers who would have had more freedom with the placements approach but now have more requirements on how their time and energy is spent with the programme approach.
- The way in which VSO country offices engage with partner organisations. Some of the partner organisations have been working with VSO for a long time and are well-acccustomed to the placements arrangement. The need for change is not universally recognised and it is therefore necessary to help partners to make the transition. This may involve exiting from those partnerships which do not demonstrate the willingness or capacity to make the transition to working with VSO in the new model.
- The way in which VSO international engages with VSO country offices. VSO international does not currently have the mandate to ensure that the country offices are operating in a specific manner and maintaining a consistent quality in their education programmes. Most of the input is at the level of advising and reviewing proposals rather than through direct support in programme development and project design. This lack of accountability is not necessarily a problem (and is reflective of the long standing culture of VSO), but it does have significant consequences for what therefore can be anticipated in terms of unified reporting and ensuring a consistent approach. In addition, it should be noted that country offices and regional directors have recently been made more accountable for meeting the development targets within programmes. Over the coming year it will be important to observe whether this translates into a significant change in approach. This will also have implications for the type of
engagement that is possible at a global level with DFID and other major donors. If VSO intends to continue working with a relatively low level of accountability from the country-level offices then steps should be taken to maximise the positive and minimise the negative consequences of this mode of operation.

VSO education needs to continue to work to address the issue of programme consistency and identity (in terms of the level to which individual programmes buy into the shared VSO approach or develop their own more autonomous identity). What is more important: maintaining the level of programme independence and autonomy, or improving the ability to monitor globally and demonstrate overall impact of VSOs activities in a consistent manner? While the nuances of a large organisation is obviously more complex than this dichotomy, it does appear that the question encapsulates the high-level challenge that VSO is facing. The desired direction of travel will dictate appropriate interventions and priorities.

5.2 Effectiveness of the VSO teacher training models

This section engages with the VSO tripartite approach to education, considers the benefits of different approaches to training, reviews the VSO work on education governance, community engagement, and the potential for the development of a curriculum and resource bank.

The VSO approach to educational improvement

The VSO ToC is based on the supposition that VSO’s impact is greatest when it includes interventions in three areas: teaching and learning, teaching governance and community engagement. The core of the tripartite theory is that the greatest impact occurs at the point of overlap between these three, as demonstrated through the VSO diagram below.

A challenge in creating a unique and cohesive approach to education is that many VSO country offices view themselves as somewhat independent entities, developing their own ToCs, designing their own programmes, and seeking funding opportunities from large donor organisations. As VSO country offices gain external funding they will automatically become more autonomous and will be increasingly answerable to other donor organisations as well as to VSO international. VSO international should be proactive in engaging with this by making clear and communicating its position regarding the extent to which the VSO country offices
should view their work as interconnected and interdependent.

Centralised, in-school and cascade approaches to teacher training

The focus of VSO’s educational work globally is to improve teacher training and promoting student-centred teaching and learning. Globally, in a majority of countries, volunteers are placed with teacher training colleges but in new projects it is increasingly common for volunteers to work directly with teachers and head teachers within primary and secondary schools.

The VSO focus on long-term investment in teacher-training is encouraging: it fits broadly with recognised good practice (OECD 2008, Hattie, 2009, DFID 2014) and should be maintained. Large numbers of teachers across diverse developing contexts receive the majority of their training input through the workshop model, where they spend a period of time being trained on a particular topic at a centralised location (in Zanzibar this is at the teacher centres), then return to their schools with the assumption that what they have learned will be implemented in the classroom. There is limited evidence that this model has a significant positive influence on teacher professional practice or student outcomes (Wei, Darling-Hammond and Adamson, 2010). In light of this and in contrast, VSO has focused on long-term training programmes, often based in schools, that model best practice and demonstrate the activities and behaviours they are attempting to impart (DFID 2014, Burns and Lawrie 2014, INEE 2013). From the experience of Zanzibar and Ethiopia, it appears that the large majority of VSO volunteers are very competent trainers who have significant prior educational experience (Gladwell 2013, Yates 2007).

The strongest elements of VSO’s work include direct interventions in the school environment: in-service teacher training direct from VSO volunteers to teachers, and working with head teachers to support school-wide changes to teaching and learning. Literature on teacher professional development indicates that the most effective models bring teachers together in a process of shared inquiry and collaborative learning and practice. There are numerous context and culture-specific models for this, including ‘teacher learning circles’ and ‘professional teaching and learning communities’. Adopting a collaborative model appropriate for each country context encourages implementation of agreed-upon best practice within the school itself, and means the types of changes promoted by teacher training and professional development efforts are more likely to be sustained. (Frisoli 2014, BouJaoude 2013, Dimock 2013). Recent research from Save the Children concludes that despite the challenges, school-based and school-cluster based training is the most effective way of providing support and development to teachers (Hardman, no date).

In some cases, VSO focusses on training teacher educators. The aim is to impart student-centred learning practices at the level of teacher training institutes, with the intention that these practices be passed onto pre-service teachers who can apply them in the classroom. At its best, this involves VSO volunteers coaching and mentoring teacher educators. However, alongside this healthy approach, sometimes the approach adopted is, in practice, more reminiscent of a classic cascade model. Evidence from evaluations of programmes in recent literature report significant challenges associated with these kind of cascade models (Gladwell 2013, Burns 2014, Ono and Ferreira 2010). This is supported by findings from Ethiopia, which suggest that only minimal student-centred practices are passed into the classroom (such as the inclusion of basic group work discussions). Research demonstrates that without the institutional backing of a capable principal, supervisor or administrator, many teachers find it almost impossible to sustain changes promoted through teacher training (Morefield 2013, Snowden 2013, Dimock 2014). This challenge was evident in both Ethiopia and Zanzibar, with some teachers keen to learn and apply new skills being limited by the wider systemic issues. It is recommended that VSO seek alternatives to cascade training wherever possible. Where it is the only available option, it should be approached as one component within a whole-school
approach, with a recognition of the significant input of time required to instigate lasting change, and with adequate given to incentives, good leadership, and on-going support.

Working directly with teachers has tangible and measurable effect and is likely to improve the strength and longevity of VSO’s impact. Rather than working indirectly with thousands of teachers through a limited cascade model, VSO could identify and focus on enhancing the capacity of model schools over a long time period in which substantial and systemic changes can be demonstrated. However, this should not lead to dismissing the work with teacher educators and education officials. Working at the systemic level increases the sustainability of VSO’s work. The important point is to note how difficult it is to translate individual capacity building into widespread change. VSO are well positioned to do this in the long term and should continue to focus on long term mentorship of key stakeholders as this will have more positive consequences than the classic cascade approach.

Education governance

A key component of improving teaching and learning is head teacher support. The impact of teaching and learning interventions are markedly greater when the buy-in of school leadership is achieved. Engagement with school leadership was something that VSO are doing effectively in both Zanzibar and Ethiopia, although often in a somewhat ad-hoc manner that would be difficult to quantify or replicate easily. There were examples of excellent engagement with leadership at Assalla CTE and Victory Elementaty School in Ethiopia. Similarly, there was excellent engagement with leadership across Unguja in Zanzibar, with volunteers investing significant time in building close working relationships with head teachers.

A significant strength of many VSO country offices is their integration within the MoE / MoEVT. In Ethiopia and Zanzibar, government officials reported that VSO is viewed as a trusted partner in strengthening the education system. Building VSO’s work at the ministry level is also important to balance increased focus on schools (rather than teacher training institutions). It is recommended that, where appropriate, VSO proactively pursue close engagement with district, regional and national government in order to contribute to long term change and have positive system-wide influence.

Many donors measure the quantity and not quality of impact on beneficiaries; a schools-based approach would negatively affect the number of beneficiaries that VSO is able to report to its donors. This is a challenge: VSO-E has already had funding proposals rejected due to a high cost-per-beneficiary ratio. It could be countered by demonstrating to donors a greater catalytic impact though targeted and measurable policy changes at the district, regional and national level. VSO would demonstrate the impact of student centred learning on attainment in model schools; then, by making use of deep working relationships with government, VSO would influence development of high-level policy changes in teacher training, and impact the implementation of those policies at the district and regional level. While likely to be effective, this approach does have challenges regarding demonstrating VfM in terms of cost-per-beneficiary. This will require the identification and adoption of impact indicators that are framed around advocating for systemic change, with final beneficiaries as indirect indicators. Appropriate responses to this will need to be determined at the country, regional and international level.

Community engagement

Community engagement is a central component of the VSO ToC. However, in Ethiopia and Zanzibar there is minimal evidence of community engagement. Where it does exist, it is implemented in an ad-hoc manner (for example by providing adult literacy classes in Ethiopia) and depends on the enthusiasm of the individual volunteer. It was therefore not possible to assess the efficacy of VSO’s community engagement work, nor possible to assess the assumption that the area of greatest change is the point of overlap between the three core
areas. VSO needs to reconsider the strategic role of community engagement. If it is to continue being a core component of VSO’s tripartite education strategy then it will be necessary to provide guidance regarding how volunteers should fulfil this mandate, and for this guidance to be communicated regularly to country offices.

The three components within VSOs tripartite theory are all important and represent a holistic approach to education system strengthening. However, their inclusion in the VSO ToC is not directly evidence based or representative of an equal weighting in activities. If community engagement is to remain as an equal component then this will require further research and strong input from VSO international, providing practical guidance as to how community engagement can take much greater prominence in the programmes than it currently does. A practical option is engagement with PTAs through participatory workshops on the importance of education, the barriers to delivering quality education and how to overcome them. This would follow VSO’s model of strengthening existing systems: long term-volunteers could practically work with the PTAs to support them in implementing what has been taught. It would require amendment to the ToC to reflect changes in practice and so that it becomes a reality.

Curriculum and resource bank

VSO volunteers have developed some excellent guidelines for student-centred teaching and learning. For example, a volunteer in Zanzibar produced a range of high quality materials to help teachers in the transition to having English as the language of instruction. Similarly, in Ethiopia, volunteers in CTEs developed model classrooms and volunteers in the ministry developed a curriculum for teaching child-centred learning. A significant amount of time from volunteers is invested into resource creation. This has positive impact on a local level but there is limited opportunity for the resources to be utilised outside their immediate context.

There is significant potential for VSO international to provide an accessible online environment where individual volunteers around the world can contribute the resources they have developed to a global bank of resources accessible to all other volunteers (recognising some initial steps have been taken to do this, with current low levels of uptake from volunteers). This would mean that volunteers can learn from each other, use high quality resources, and save time. A well-utilised global resource bank would be particularly valuable for new volunteers arriving in-country, enabling them to contribute to positive change more quickly than if they needed to create all resources themselves from scratch.

It is clear that VSO works in a wide range of different educational contexts, each with its own national curriculum. The resources would not be completely transferable and would need to be intelligently categorised. This would be aided by a sorting system including education level (eg lower, middle and upper primary), subject and learning style. There are other online environments (from other organisations) designed for resource sharing that do not work as well as would be anticipated. In order to ensure volunteers actually make use of the environment it would be necessary to have detailed pre-deployment training in usage, regular input from national offices, and regular reminders to promote usage: all these things in combination would help to facilitate the development of an online community of volunteers actively involved in resource sharing.

5.3 Outcomes and identifying possible long-term impacts

This section addresses the extent to which VSO’s programmes improve the capacity of teachers and create better teaching and learning environments and outcomes for students.

Outcomes

The analysis of VSO’s effectiveness is based on anecdotal evidence from Ethiopia and Zanzibar.
The majority of country offices globally have limited capacity and few formalised mechanisms for collecting, collating and utilising data on educational incomes. As a result, it is not possible to give definitive, quantitative input regarding the outcomes-based efficacy of VSO’s education work. In Ethiopia, systematic reporting is limited to volunteers’ quarterly narrative reports and an annual partnership review (when beneficiary numbers are calculated from CTE teacher data). In Zanzibar, while there is a strong recognition of the need for systematic data collection, it is currently somewhat ad-hoc in nature.

Analysis of anecdotal evidence from education programmes in Ethiopia and Zanzibar demonstrates that there are notable outcomes following some VSO interventions, but that these outcomes vary between institutions and volunteers. Securing positive outcomes is heavily reliant on the individual volunteer and the relationship they are able to build with the partner. It was widely observed that the most significant impact takes place where there is strong support from leadership, when the volunteer is meeting a recognised need, and when subsequent volunteers can build on the work that has been started.

A case for strengthening VSO’s M&E

VSO has taken positive steps towards improving measurement of impact and outcomes in its programmes. It has recently launched online courses that provide information on the ToC and M&E methodologies, which can be accessed by all staff. In several countries, technology platforms have been (or are being) developed to facilitate data capture. VSO should look to build on its online systems to facilitate continual data capture, improved use of volunteer data, and knowledge sharing – ensuring that the system is globally utilised. However, the current way in which data is used at the country level does not fully meet the requirements of most international donors and there is limited understanding of how to conduct sufficiently rigorous baseline testing, overall data collection, the importance of outcomes, and the nuances of attribution analysis.

Developing strategies and tools for robust impact data from educational programmes will take time and effort. However, this is a vital and necessary step in creating evidence that will support the theory of change, inform future educational work and allow VSO to advocate its VfM based on demonstrable outcomes. There is also a current frustration regarding data collection and reporting among the individual volunteers. Several research participants in Zanzibar and Ethiopia expressed some scepticism regarding what happens with what is submitted and what purpose is served from the data reports in terms of actually influencing programme decisions.

VSO should move towards tracking and measuring training outcomes as well as training outputs, and quality as well as quantity (Haines 2013). Structure reporting so that it focuses on an objective measure of the extent to which learning is actually transferred to the classroom. The number of teachers trained (an output indicator) is less important than the changes that have happened in the classroom and the impact on students learning (outcome indicators). Developing indicators for learning outcomes is not simple. Some organisations rely on teachers reporting changes in their level of confidence or changes in classroom activity - this is a valid indicator but relatively weak as a measure of outcome. Instead, data collection should focus on documenting changes in classroom practices and student attainment. Building an evidence-base of outcomes is easiest when the training courses have specific and measureable anticipated outcomes, for example, reduction in corporal punishment, or lessons that cater for all four learning styles and incorporate student-centred methodologies such as group work. Collecting evidence is then achieved through observation sheets that show the proportion of lessons that meet these indicators before and after training. It is then also important that this kind of outcomes data is collected six months and one year after the training to assess the long-term outcomes and the extent to which initial changes have been sustained.
If each of the country programmes is going to remain relatively autonomous in deciding the nature and extent of their education activities then it will be necessary to re-evaluate the extent to which they can be expected to submit data that is suitable for global aggregation. It will be challenging to operate effectively as a cohesive global unit in terms of presentation to DFID without being more prescriptive regarding country level activities and therefore reporting metrics and requirements. One potential route forward in this situation could be that VSO international – through a period of consultation with country offices - could decide on a small number of high-level indicators that country programmes are encouraged to track in relation to their educational outputs and outcomes. This could use a portfolio of indicators, where all programmes are expected to track the one, two or three indicators that are most relevant for their particular activities. This would facilitate some degree of global aggregation without necessitating an overly prescriptive approach to programme activities.

The need for systematised learning

There are encouraging signs that VSO is working to improve its inter-country learning on education through facilitating peer-based reviews of different programmes. The early indications are that these exchanges are well appreciated, fruitful, and to be encouraged. VSO international have also made good progress in terms of the resources (learning reports, regular committees, gatherings and the facilitation of peer evaluation) available to guide and support the country-level education programmes. However, it is necessary to build on this and ensure that the required work is done to promote the utilisation of all these resources. The positive implications of a more systematic approach to capturing learning would be felt at a range of different levels:

- Systematizing learning would have positive implications for improving the continuity between the different generations of volunteers. At present there is limited evidence of a well-developed ‘handover’ processes between out-going and incoming volunteers.
- Systematizing learning would also have positive impact on the ability of the programmes to report in a rigorous and consistent manner regarding the nature of their outputs and outcomes. This will make it easier for VSO international to communicate with DFID regarding what ‘impact’ can be claimed in teacher education across all the education programmes.

5.4 Sustainability of the VSO teacher training model

This section addresses the sustainability of placing skilled education volunteers in education institutions in order to increase teacher effectiveness.

Programme sustainability

The VSO programmes visited placed significant emphasis on the aspiration that the different projects – and the associated positive impacts from them – should be able to continue in the future without requiring the on-going input of VSO volunteers. At present, there is limited evidence that the positive impacts of the projects would continue without the VSO volunteers. Indeed, many of the activities are directly dependent on the on-going input of the volunteers. One example is the way in which several volunteers on Zanzibar emphasised that the biggest threat facing their projects was the limited chance of it being maintained once they left. This was corroborated by a number of head teachers and teacher educators who identified the same current threat. This situation requires considering an adjustment of approach. One option is to be explicit in recognising that the way in which many volunteers work means that sustainability will not always be possible. The other option is to work proactively to continue on the journey towards established programmes rather than individual placements, and embrace the challenging consequences that will accompany a change of this nature (input of resources,
training and fundamental change in approach that will be required to make it a reality).

Financial sustainability

The experiences from Zanzibar and Ethiopia both demonstrated the challenges that VSO are currently facing in attracting funding for their education work, and are likely to face increasingly in the future. VSO in Ethiopia have recently been unsuccessful with a couple of applications to DFID for funding their education work. Programmes in other countries are likely to have similar difficulties as they navigate the requirements of securing funding on the basis of their programme outputs.

To become competitive in securing funds at a country level it will be necessary to make significant investment in improving the documenting of evidence (as documented in the previous section). One particularly important aspect to consider is the current emphasis being placed on the demonstration of VfM when preparing bids for DFID (and other donor) funding. At present, there is little capacity within the reporting infrastructure of VSO programmes (baselines, control groups, data collation, rigour in presentation etc) to demonstrate competitive VfM at the level of programme outcomes.

Continuity

One key component in the effective transition from a placement to programme-based approach is the transition phase between out-going and in-coming volunteers. At present, there appears to be minimal structured handover – with many current volunteers having no idea what will happen after they leave or whether there will even be another volunteer continuing their work. This disconnection between generations of volunteers is a significant threat to VSO in making the transition to an effective programme-based approach. It should gradually become normal for volunteers to be placed into pre-existing, already functioning programmes, with their work involving a high degree of overlap with their predecessor. This requires significant work from the VSO international and country teams to ensure that the new volunteers have the right skills and experience to continue building and developing the current programmes. It is also worth considering changing default practice so that there is a period of two or three months overlap between out-going and in-coming volunteers. This would ensure sufficient time for knowledge transfer and would facilitate genuine continuity of programme activities.

Branding and visibility

VSO’s visibility and brand recognition varies among partner organisations. VSO has been in Zanzibar for 50 years and in Ethiopia for almost 30 years. Considering the longevity of VSO’s work, brand awareness is notably low: partner employees (such as teachers or teacher educators) remember individual volunteers and their particular contributions but they often do not know the name ‘VSO’ or understand that the individuals they interacted with are part of a global organisation. At the national level VSO has significantly stronger brand awareness within the MoEVT in Zanzibar and MoE in Ethiopia. In both of these ministries, VSO has a strong reputation, is well established and has implemented branded programmes (an example of this is the HDP in Ethiopia). The limited brand recognition of VSO at a local level may be of little concern. However it may become more challenging as activities become increasingly programme-based at the national level: as the national offices seek more international funding then it may be helpful for local beneficiaries to have more awareness of VSO’s broader identity.

Working in partnership

Working in partnership with ministries has various consequences, mostly positive and some negative. It is recommended that VSO continue to integrate with pre-existing government structures for improving teacher effectiveness wherever possible. However, this should be
done with a high degree of awareness regarding the challenging consequences and a strategy for overcoming them and maximising the benefits. Working through ministries and adopting an approach of co-production requires a long time and the recognition of the slow pace of change that often occurs. One of the most transformative ways in which VSO can have impact is when volunteers build strong relationships with decision makers within ministries. An example of this was seen in Zanzibar where, because of the input of a volunteer, the relevant director within the ministry was considering altering the approach to appointing head teachers in all primary and secondary schools in Zanzibar, introducing job specifications and transparent recruitment.

It is recommended that VSO consider strategic positioning of suitably qualified volunteers (such as former head teachers who also have strong relational skills, or those with a particular specialism) in positions of maximum influence within the ministry (at a national, regional or local level). This would need to be given steer by the programme team in country and would also be dependent on implementing the recommendations regarding increased continuity. In addition, this is only likely to be effective where the volunteer in question has a high level of cultural understanding and is well acquainted with the political context. In Zanzibar it was evident that volunteers were more able to operate effectively at a strategic level once they had spent significant time working locally. One possible approach that would be appropriate in certain contexts is to place volunteers within a group of schools for the first year and then within a Ministry for the second year. This again will be dependent on the transition from placements to integrated programming.

### 5.5 Theory of change

The diagram below is taken from a longer narrative document that explains the full Theory of Change in VSO’s education work (VSO 2013). The recommendations regarding the Theory of Change are focused on the diagram and also have implications for the associated narrative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>Recruit, train and support volunteers from the global North and South through our federation members</td>
<td>Build capacity</td>
<td>More effective education institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Provide funding to support volunteer and partner activities</td>
<td>Add capacity</td>
<td>Empowered individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge &amp; Learning</td>
<td>Provide mechanisms for support learning and knowledge exchange between volunteers and partners</td>
<td>Advocate for change</td>
<td>Stronger communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Management</td>
<td>Develop global and national strategies to identify and develop partnerships with state, private sector and civil society organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Produce individual partnership plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop volunteering initiatives and volunteer placements</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The diagram shows the inputs, intervention, outputs, and impact of the Theory of Change in VSO’s education work. The recommendations regarding the Theory of Change are focused on the diagram and also have implications for the associated narrative.
Specific input to consider

One of the powerful aspects of a well-designed ToC is that it provides clear diagrammatic representation of how the activities of the organisation are connected together and lead towards the desired outcomes (O’Flynn 2013). The VSO ToC provides a summary of the high-level activities but could have a clearer demonstration of how one stage leads to the next. The following proposed amendments may help the ToC become a more constructive tool for both potential donors and country offices.

- The introduction of a column labelled ‘vision’ at the far right side. This would be a suitable place to include the text currently under the ‘impact’ column. This will enable the text under ‘impact’ to be more specifically linked to the three programme areas of VSO’s work
- The reorganisation of ‘intervention’ to incorporate it within an ‘activities’ column
- The potential addition of an ‘outputs’ column in a way that can link to emerging indicators
- The introduction of more visual definition so that the viewer can easily understand what is being communicated: this could be achieved through arrows to show the causal pathways between the different stages.

Additional possible amendments

First, developing a global ToC for a large, diverse organisation is inherently challenging. In order to be most effective, a single high-level ToC should be developed that can encompass the different aspects of VSO’s educational strategy. This should be accessible and suitable for both an internal and external audience: the primary reference point for anyone seeking to understand the dynamic of VSO’s work in education. The narrative can support the diagram, providing more detail on all aspects.

Second, the current ToC is based on three areas where VSO work in education: teaching and learning, teaching governance and community engagement. The ToC is based on the premise that VSO’s greatest impact occurs when all three are present, working in the same location. There are a few examples of good volunteer collaboration in Ethiopia, most notably between HDP volunteers in the MoE and CTEs. However, in general from the evaluations in Ethiopia and Zanzibar there is not strong evidence of VSO’s impact being increased specifically as a result of the tripartite, collaborative approach. It is recommended that VSO therefore consider changing the way in which collaboration is talked about, or change the emphasis on community engagement.

Third, there should be clear guidance provided from VSO international regarding how the ToC can be applied at a country-specific level. This should include development and distribution of several ‘sample’ country level ToCs, to help each country structure their own effectively. The effectiveness of all three aspects of the tripartite theory is dependent on the dynamics of the wider education system. This is influenced by ‘policy, research and advocacy’ – so it is worth considering whether this would be better positioned as a cross-cutting theme rather than an external factor.

Fourth, in Ethiopia and Zanzibar there was limited awareness of the ToC among VSO volunteers. For those that were aware of its existence, it did not play a significant role in shaping their activities. There is a feeling at the VSO international level that the volunteers should be aware of the ToC and using it to shape their activities. If this is decided then there will need to be a much greater emphasis on the ToC at initial training and throughout – with practical guidance regarding how it can have positive impact on their activities.

Fifth, there is a feeling within the VSO international team that the ToC will need to remain
flexible and constantly evolving according to the feedback of country offices. It is recommended that VSO continue the comprehensive feedback exercise with country offices and volunteers, and then once this is complete, fix the ToC for a period of at least 2 years. This period of stability will allow it to become a tool that the country offices use to aid the way they articulate their programmes. If it is constantly being tweaked then it will lose its power.

Sixth, one practical way to increase volunteer engagement with the ToC is to develop three additional ToCs each of which cover one area of activity (teaching and learning, education governance, and community engagement) each of which can nest underneath the overarching ToCs. In addition, a toolkit can be produced to give practical guidance to each country office so that they can develop high-quality ToCs that are applicable to their individual contexts and activities. Articulating country level activities in this way will lead to a more compelling funding pitch. It is these additional ToCs that can be constantly tweaked, at the discretion of the country office.

6. Concluding recommendations

This meta-analysis has focused on the areas VSO should consider for potential improvement. There are many positive aspects of VSO’s work in education which, due to the nature of the report, have not featured in so much detail. When VSO is working most effectively, high level transformative impact can be achieved with limited inputs. For this to become the norm, it will be necessary to continue to make significant investment in the change process from individual placements to integrated programmes. In summary, and drawing from the detailed recommendations explored above, in order to move forward in its global education work VSO should consider the following:

- Concentrate on best-practice models of teacher training, avoid cascade approaches where possible, and invest in model schools in which the impact of student centred methods can be demonstrated.
- Be increasingly strategic and explicit regarding the aspiration to engage and integrate with ministries and instigate change on a structural, system-wide level (through placing appropriate individual volunteers there).
- Decide the appropriate balance between country level autonomy and shared reporting – and engage proactively with the consequences of whatever position is adopted.
- Consider what universally applicable indicators can be collected and collated across all education programmes, even if these are very light.
- Help programmes to articulate their activities more clearly and to conduct the appropriate data collection and rigorous M&E that is necessary for international donors.
- Continue to invest in all aspects of the transition from placements to programmes, recognising that the change will take years to accomplish, with sustained input of significant time and energy.
- Recognise the lack of a robust evidence base for the tripartite theory - especially the absence of community engagement work in Zanzibar or Ethiopia – and consider appropriate adjustments.
- Make amendments to the ToC and then utilise it as a tool for helping all levels of VSO understand the nature and rationale of the education strategy and programmes.
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