Volunteering for development in South Sudan:

'Values for money'

Prepared for VSO South Sudan

Irko Zuurmond

In collaboration with: Bev Jones and Lydia Richardson

June 2014

TRIPLELINE

CONSULTING

Acknowledgements

On behalf of VSO South Sudan, Triple Line Consulting conducted research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan during the period 2012-2013. During this period we conducted a large number of interviews with volunteers, VSO staff and partner organisations.

We would like to thank all volunteers, staff and partner organisations for their input during the course of this research. We would like to say a special thanks to the 42 volunteers included in the sample for sharing their experiences. Their energy, commitment and motivation have been truly inspirational. We would like to thank all staff at the VSO Country Office for their inputs and continuous support provided during the course of the research. We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all staff from partner organisations interviewed for sharing their experiences and reflections on the role of volunteers in the development context of South Sudan. And finally we would like to thank Alex Rusita and Ann Mutua for helping us conduct the interviews with volunteers and partner organisations, while defying the odds of challenging logistics.

This research demonstrates the effectiveness of volunteering for development in the context of South Sudan. It explores the added value of volunteering for development in general, and in specifically in fragile states. It shows how VSO has become an important and recognised player in the development scene in South Sudan building on its distinctive approach. Its approach to volunteering for development sets a strong example of how INGOs can support a development agenda that is owned and driven by South Sudanese organisations themselves. It embodies the spirit of the emerging international development agenda post 2015.

At the time of writing this report, South Sudan is in a state of turmoil, as a result of which VSO has decided to suspend its programme. We hope that the situation stabilises in the foreseeable future, so that the inspirational journey by VSO and its partner organisations in South Sudan can be continued.

Acronyms

BSF	Basic Services Fund
CES	Central Equatoria State
CHD	County Health Department
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
EES	Eastern Equatoria State
GESS	Girls Education South Sudan
HPF	Health Pooled Fund
IGAD	International Authority on Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SGD	Strategic Development Goals
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
UN	United Nations
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
V4D	Volunteering for Development
VCT	Voluntary Counselling and Testing
WES	Western Equatoria State

Table of Contents

Tables:

Figures:

Executive summary

This report reflects the findings of a two year research project (May 2012 – December 2014) into the value of volunteering in South Sudan. The research was conducted by Triple Line Consulting on behalf of VSO South Sudan. Between January 2012 and December 2013, VSO placed 81 international volunteers to support South Sudanese organisations in education, health and governance.

The research addresses a need to better understand the role of volunteering for development in the context of fragile states. It generated information that helped VSO shape its programme in South Sudan. At the same time the findings contribute to the development of a knowledge base on the value of volunteering in general.

The research responded to a set of research questions formulated by VSO. It looked at the role of volunteering in the context of South Sudan; the process of engagement between VSO and its partner organisations; VSO's inputs into the partnership; the outcomes generated at the level of counterparts and partner organisations; the changes at community level; and VSO's value added.

Triple Line applied a mix of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitative data were collected through quarterly reports by all volunteers. In addition, basic statistics were generated though VSO's volunteer database. Qualitative information was gathered through semi-structured, periodic interviews with a sample of 42 volunteers and their partner organisations.

Originally the research was intended to run until September 2014. However, VSO suspended its programme following the civil unrest that broke out in mid-December 2013. As a result all volunteers were safely evacuated. The findings in this report are therefore based on the data and information collected during 2012-2013.

While the focus of this research was on the assessment of the value of volunteering in South Sudan, its integration in an overarching monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework from the start of the programme has enabled VSO to respond effectively and efficiently to both internal and external reporting requirements, including the requirements of VSO South Sudan's principle donor – the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID). It has enabled VSO to generate a body of evidence that has been used for multiple purposes. VSO may wish to explore the application of a similar model in other countries.

This report provides compelling evidence of the 'hard' and 'soft' development outcomes generated at the level of counterparts and partner organisations through the placement of 81 volunteers over a two-year period. Hard development outcomes include generic as well as sector-specific outcomes such as improvements in human resource management, finance management, school administration, school inspection, supervision of health centres, nurse training, advocacy and monitoring and evaluation. However, equally important are the soft development outcomes such as improvements in morale, team work, ownership and self-reliance, problem solving, etc. The report argues that the combination of hard and soft outcomes is inherent to VSO's approach to volunteering for development. It makes it distinctive from other forms of technical assistance. VSO's approach is therefore particularly relevant for the fragile context of South Sudan.

While initial interviews with two selected communities highlighted positive changes at community level, it was too early to conclude to what extent the changes at the level of counterparts and partner organisations had systematically translated into changes at impact level.

Key factors that contribute to the effectiveness of VSO's programme include a strong, systemic programme design; investment in development that is led by its partner organisations; engagement

in large donor-funded initiatives; high quality inputs through international volunteers; the attributes associated with volunteering for development (V4D); duration of engagement; pitching volunteer input at an appropriate level; and the delivery of a combination of hard and soft development outcomes.

The effectiveness of VSO's approach to V4D in South Sudan, at a cost of £66 per volunteer per day, means that the VSO's programme offers remarkably high value for money and at a significant scale. The unit cost compares favourably with the costs of other forms or technical assistance.

When given the hypothetical choice between a volunteer for a year or US$35k, 12 out of 13 partner organisations said that they would prefer a volunteer, which reflects their recognition of the added value of this long-term investment.

The report concludes that VSO's approach to volunteering for development puts the organisation in a very strong position to contribute to the long term development agenda in the fragile context of South Sudan. It supports South Sudanese organisations in taking ownership of and furthering the long-term development agenda. Its approach it therefore consistent with the spirit of the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action; the Istanbul principles for CSO development effectiveness; and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States.

This report may help V4D organisations position themselves more strategically in the debate about the Strategic Development Goals that will replace the current Millennium Development Goals after 2015.

1 Introduction

Following the declaration of independence of South Sudan in 2011, VSO decided to open a programme in this newest country in the world. The programme was largely funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID).

The aim of the programme was to strengthen the capacity of South Sudanese organisations to deliver quality programmes and services and be accountable to the citizens in this youngest country in the world. To that effect VSO developed partnerships with both governmental and non-governmental organisations. Following consultation with government officials as well as representatives from national and international NGOs, VSO decided to focus on education, health and governance[1] to address some of the most pressing needs in country. This programme focus also reflects VSO's experience and expertise globally.

After a period of preparation in 2011, the first volunteers arrived in country in January 2012. By December 2013 VSO had placed a total of 81 international volunteers[2].

In May 2012 VSO South Sudan contracted Triple Line Consulting to provide evaluation and research support. The support consisted of:

- The development of a logframe in support of the grant agreement between VSO South Sudan and DFID South Sudan;
- Collection of baseline data against the logframe in June 2012;
- The consolidation of quarterly data against the indicators identified in the logframe, using the quarterly reports submitted by volunteers; and
- The realisation of research on the value of volunteering in the post-conflict situation in South Sudan.

The purpose of the research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan was threefold:

- To generate information that would help VSO shape its programme in South Sudan. This was particularly pertinent as South Sudan was an entirely new and extremely fragile context in which VSO decided to operate at large scale.
- To capture the lessons learnt that could inform the development of VSO's programmes in similar contexts in other countries.
- To help address a gap in the evidence-base that shows the development outcomes of volunteering for development (V4D) and the contribution of V4D to the broader development agenda.

This report consolidates the findings of the research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan against the research questions identified by VSO. It highlights the type of development outcomes generated through volunteering, as well as the distinctiveness of V4D in comparison with other types of development assistance.

The report is informed by different sources of information, including interviews with key informants at VSO; periodic, semi-structured interviews with volunteers; periodic, semi-structured interviews

---

[1] The governance programme reflects VSO's work with South Sudanese Civil Society Organisations. In the original design of the governance programme, the focus of this programme would be on advocacy and strengthening accountability processes. In practice, the majority of volunteers in this programme focussed on strengthening general institutional capacity thereby addressing the most immediate needs of the partner organisations themselves.

[2] While globally VSO promotes both national and international volunteering, in case of its programme in South Sudan in 2012-2013, the focus was on international volunteers only.

with selected partner organisations that directly benefit from the placement of volunteers; interviews with other partner organisations; as well review of the quarterly reports by volunteers.

Originally this two-year research project was intended to run from September 2012 until September 2014. However, following the conflict that broke out in December 2013 VSO decided to suspend its programme. The findings in this report are therefore based on the data and information gathered since the start of the programme until December 2013. In most cases this evidence-base is sufficient to respond to most of the research questions. There are, however, a number of gaps in the evidence-base as a result of which some research questions can only partially be responded to. The limitations will be discussed in chapter 2.

The report is structured as follows:

- Section 2 describes the research questions identified by VSO, the conceptual framework that underpins the research, the mix of methodologies used to gather evidence in response to the research questions and the limitations.
- Section 3 describes VSO's programme in South Sudan and provides an overview of the socio-political context in which it is implemented.
- Section 4 presents the research findings. The structure follows the research questions identified by VSO.
- Section 5 reflects on the sustainability of VSO's approach to volunteering for development.
- Section 6 reflects on the cost-effectiveness and value added of VSO's approach in South Sudan.
- Section 7 draws the main conclusions based on the evidence presented in this report.

With the increasing emphasis on development effectiveness this report is timely. The evidence of the development outcomes generated through volunteering for development, and the uniqueness and added value of V4D as an approach to development, may help V4D organisations position themselves more strategically in the debate about the Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) that will replace the current Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after 2015.

2 Research design

This section describes the overall design of this research project. Section 2.1 identifies the main drivers behind the research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan. This is followed by an overview of the research questions identified by VSO (Section 2.2), the conceptual framework developed to respond to the research questions (Section 2.3), an overview of the mix of methodologies used to generate the information needed to respond to the research questions (Section 2.4) and the sample of partner organisations periodically visited during the course this research project (Section 2.5). Section 2.6 identifies the gaps in data and information and the implications for responding to some of the research questions. Section 2.7 describes the way the wealth of data and information have been analysed.

2.1 Rationale and utility

As mentioned in the introduction, there are a number of drivers behind this piece of research on the value of volunteering in a post-conflict situation.

Firstly, the research was set up to generate information that would help VSO South Sudan shape its programme and optimise the potential and effectiveness of volunteering for development in this youngest country in the world. As a result the research included elements of real-time evaluation and operations research. Data and information were gathered throughout the implementation of the programme and regular consolidation and analysis took place to generate an up-to-date picture of programme performance allowing for the early identification of emerging trends, strengths and weaknesses. This information was fed into management decision making about the strategic direction of the programme. At the same time it informed VSO's reporting, both internally and to DFID.

Secondly, the findings of the research and the lessons learnt would enable VSO to articulate its potential role in fragile states in general. This was particularly important against the backdrop of an organisational drive to increase its presence in low-income countries, including countries affected by conflicts and disasters.

Thirdly, the longer-term research findings would contribute to the establishment of an evidence-base that shows the types of development outcomes generated through V4D, its uniqueness and added value, and the contribution it makes to the wider development agenda. It responds to a recognised need to document the impact of international volunteering programmes (Lough and Lenore 2013), in particular against the backdrop of the increased emphasis on managing for results and mutual accountability following the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action (OECD 2005). It requires the assessment of V4D beyond isolated case studies that tend to focus on individual placements. Instead it needs to capture the contribution of V4D to change at systemic level. It requires an understanding of the political, social and organisational ecosystem in which volunteers operate. This need to understand the role and effectiveness for V4D has become even more pressing with the current debate about the future direction of international development post 2015 (Devereux and Guse 2012).

The establishment of VSO's programme in South Sudan provided a unique opportunity to gather evidence from the start of the programme. This enabled the researchers to capture the situation at base-line, assess change over time, and identify VSO's contribution to these changes through the placement of volunteers and other programme inputs.

The opportunity to establish the research from the start meant that the research could be integrated with VSO's regular monitoring and evaluation, thereby optimising the utility of the information generated and reducing the duplication of effort. In addition to seeking a response to the research

questions identified by VSO, the information generated informed management-decision at Country Office level; VSO's reporting to DFID South Sudan; as well as VSO's reporting to VSO HQ. Combining this piece of research with VSO's regular M&E processes therefore provides a good example of real-time evaluation that is utility-focussed. VSO may wish to explore the application of a similar model in other countries.

2.2 Research questions

At the start of the programme the VSO South Sudan identified a number of research questions regarding the value of volunteering in South Sudan. The questions were identified in consultation with the first group of VSO volunteers in-country as well as DFID representatives in South Sudan.

The research questions were clustered under the following headings:

1. **Role and contribution of VSO in the broader development context of South-Sudan:**
- What is VSO's role as perceived by VSO, its partners and other development actors?
- What is the relevance of VSO in the context of South Sudan?
- What is VSO's niche in the context of South Sudan?

2. **Process of engagement between VSO and partner organisations:**
- What is the process?
- How do partners perceive the quality of the process?
- How does the process contribute to VSO's accountability to partners?

3. **VSO's inputs into partnerships:**
- What are the VSO main inputs into the partnership?
- How do partners perceive the quality of VSO's inputs?
- What is the relevance of the inputs against the backdrop of key change processes at the level of partner organisations?

4. **Outcomes at the level of immediate colleagues/counterparts and their organisations:**
- What are the changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours at the level of colleagues/counterparts?
- What are the changes in capacity and services provided by partner organisations?
- What are the changes as a result of VSO-supported advocacy initiatives? What is VSO's contribution to these changes?
- What factors influence these changes?

5. **Change at community level (ultimate beneficiaries):**
- What are the changes in the quality of services provided?
- What are the changes in the use of the services provided?
- What are the changes in people's lives as a results of improved service provision?
- What factors influence these changes?

6. **VSO's value added:**
- What would have happened without VSO's support?
- How does VSO's contribution compare to the contribution by other organisations?
- How does VSO contribute to the implementation of programmes by other INGOs?

2.3 Volunteering for development: conceptual framework

VSO's global strategy, *People First* (VSO 2011), describes VSO's approach to development[3]. It highlights the type of change VSO aims to affect through its people-centred approach, in particular:

- Improving poor people's access to quality services;
- Promoting the development and implementation of policies to support poor people;
- Ensuring the participation of socially excluded groups in determining their own path to development;
- Building organisational capacity to support these aims.

Using VSO's global strategy as a starting point, a conceptual framework was developed during the course of the research project. Given the large number of unknown parameters at the start of the research, and indeed at the start of the programme, *thematic content analysis* was used to develop the conceptual framework (Green and Thorogood 2009). Its development was an iterative process, allowing for emerging issues to be incorporated.

The diagram overleaf visualises the conceptual framework. It identifies the key elements, as well as their synergies and interdependencies, that ultimately determine the effectiveness of V4D in generating lasting development results. It recognises that volunteers work in complex social, political and organisational ecosystems, in which change happens as a result of the efforts of many different actors (United Nations Volunteers 2011).

The key elements of the conceptual framework include the following:

- **VSO:** Its processes from programme design; the identification of partner organisations and volunteer placements; the development of placement descriptions; to volunteer recruitment, preparation and support.
- **Partner organisations:** Their culture, capacity, resources, commitment to change, etc.
- **Counterparts:** The colleagues volunteers directly work with, their capacity, commitment to change, etc.
- **Volunteers:** Their skills and behaviour, personal attributes, the attributes of volunteering, etc.
- **VSO inputs** other than volunteers, such as small grants, facilitation of networking, knowledge brokering, etc.
- **Inputs by others**, including development agencies, communities, etc.
- **Changes at the level of individuals/counterparts**, as a result of the concerted effort of volunteers, their counterpart and partner organisation.
- **Changes at the level of partner organisations**, as a result of the concerted effort of volunteers, their counterparts and partner organisations themselves.
- **Sustainable change in the lives of people and communities** through equal access to quality services and improved accountability processes
- **External environment** in which VSO, volunteers and their partner organisations operate and which is largely beyond their sphere of control and influence.

The framework has been used to analyse the data and information generated through the application of mixed methodologies (see section 2.4).

---

[3] It should be noted that a more up-to-date theory of change is currently being development. This, however, was not yet published at the time of writing this report.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
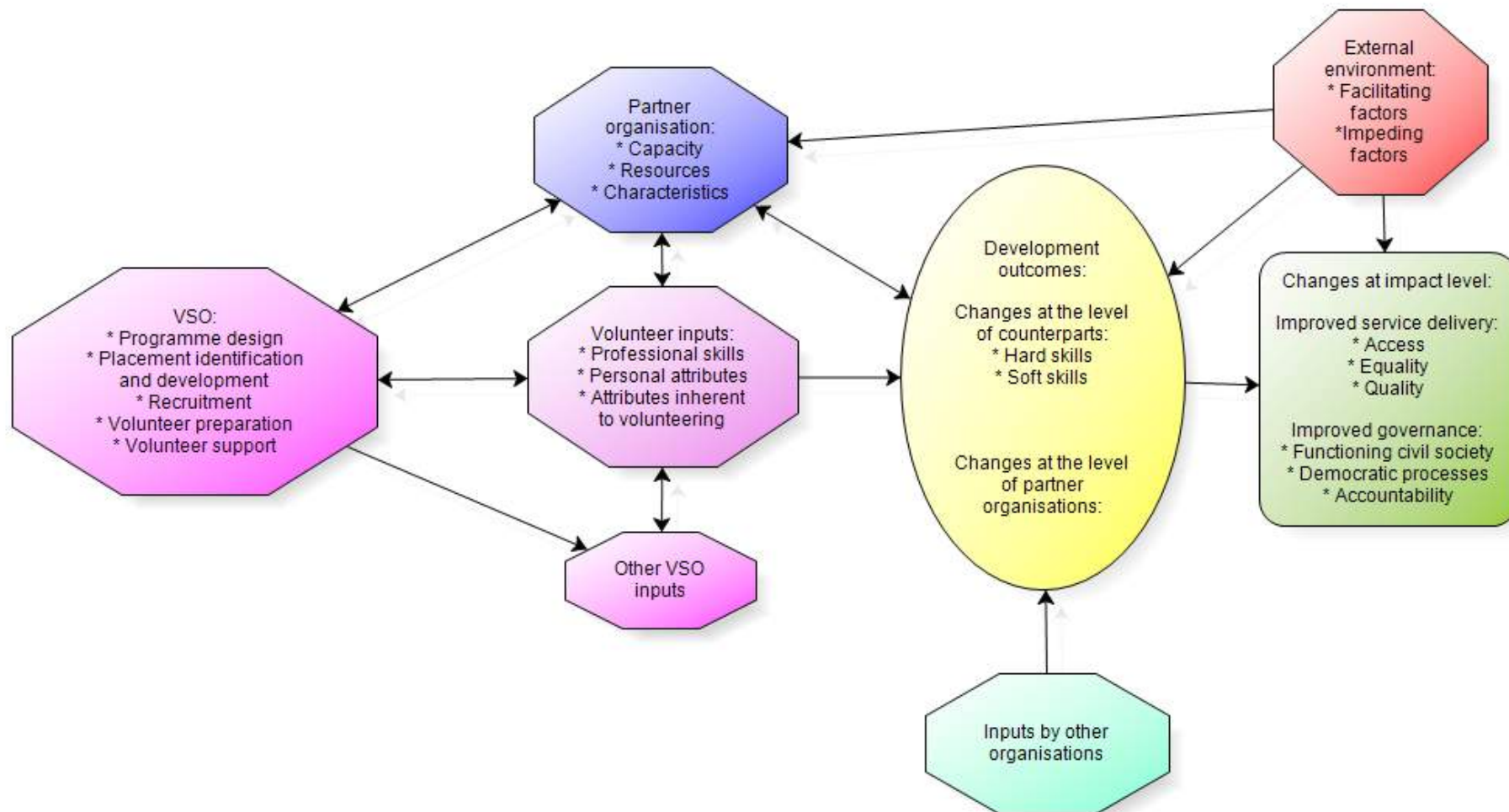
2.4   Methodology

As mentioned in the previous section, volunteers work in complex political, social and organisational ecosystems. Bringing about change in such environment, in order for government departments and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to deliver improved programmes and services, requires a concerted effort by many different stakeholders. While volunteers can play an important role in facilitating these processes of change, in most cases the end result is determined by many different actors and factors. Given the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of the development programmes VSO volunteers are involved in, a mix of methodologies that reflect a contribution-based logic is therefore appropriate (Stern, Stame et al. 2012).

To assess the value of volunteering in the in the context of South Sudan a mix of methodologies was applied to capture the changes and the contributions made by volunteers. When selecting the mix of research methodologies, the following considerations were made:

≡   Flexibility and applicability of the mix of methodologies to a wide range of very different partner organisations and volunteer placements.

≡   The need for the mix of methodologies to capture both the broader changes occurring at the level of partner organisations as well as the contributions made by volunteers to these changes.

≡   The need to capture the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in and/or affected by the processes of change.

≡   Optimisation of utility of data and information: The opportunity for the mix of methodologies to generate information relevant for answering the research questions as well as for VSO's immediate information needs, in particular for management decision making and reporting to DFID. Some of the data collection was therefore built into VSO's regular M&E processes.

≡   The practicality of applying the methodologies in the challenging operational environment of South Sudan.

Table 1 shows the methodologies developed and applied specifically for this piece of research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan, while table 2 reflects the methodologies that are part of VSO South Sudan's regular M&E processes.

Table 1: Specific methodologies for the research on the value of volunteering in South Sudan

Methodology	Description	Type of information gathered	Frequency of application	Sample size
Key informant interviews with VSO South Sudan staff.	Interviews with core VSO staff: Regional Director, Country Director, Programme Managers and Finance Manager.	• Contextual information • Strategic information regarding VSO's programme in South Sudan • Operational information	Continuous	NA
Review of strategic documents	Review of internal strategic documents; strategic documents between VSO and the Government of South Sudan and DFID; placement descriptions; placement reviews; etc.	• Contextual information • Strategic information regarding VSO's programme in South Sudan	Continuous	NA
Semi-structured interviews with partner organisations and their volunteers using *Ladders of Change*[4]	*Ladders of Change* build on the key principles of Appreciative Inquiry, by taking an asset-based approach that looks at the contributions each actor (both individuals and organisations) makes towards reaching an ideal scenario. It is a very flexible, participatory methodology that can be applied to different types of partners in different types of context. The Ladders of Change facilitate visualisation of change over time. Using a structured template, summary information was captured in interview write-ups for analysis in NVIVO	• Identification of strengths and weaknesses of organisational capacity, quality of services and/or quality of programmes • Future aspirations with regard to the above. • Change over time with regard to the above, both positive and negative • Contributions made by different actors with regard to the changes that have occurred • Attributes of volunteers that enable volunteers to contribute to these changes	First interview 3 months into the volunteer placement, followed by 6-12 months repeat visit depending on the duration of placement	In total 42 volunteers and their partner organisations were followed Of these, 37 placements had started in 2012, which represents 79% of all 2012 placements. Five placement that started in 2013 were added.

---

[4] 'Ladders of Change' has been developed over time by INTRAC and the CSSP team in Ethiopia, Triple Line in Nepal, and adapted for VSO South Sudan.

Methodology	Description	Type of information gathered	Frequency of application	Sample size
Choice scenarios	Following completion of the volunteer placement partner organisation are given the hypothetical choice between a volunteer for one year or US$35k. They are then asked the reason for choosing a particular option.	• Partner reflection on the value of volunteering, based on the experience of the completed volunteer placement.	Following completion of volunteer placement	13 out of 42 partner organisations
What-if scenarios	Following completion of the volunteer placement partner organisations are asked what would be different if the volunteer had not been in place.	• Partner reflection on the value of volunteering and hypothetical counterfactual	Following completion of volunteer placement	7 out of 42 partner organisations
Semi-structured interviews with *other* partner organisations	Interviews with partner organisations who are indirectly affected/ benefitting from the placement of a volunteer.	• External perception of VSO's contribution to processes of change • External perception of VSO's added value and distinctiveness	Once	DFID, GESS, Merlin, National NGO Forum, SNV, UNICEF, UNV
Sentinel communities	An approach in which a limited number of communities are visited on a periodic basis to assess change over time using qualitative and quantitative information, and identify the actors and factors that have contributed to those changes. It provides an opportunity to understand how changes at the level of partner organisations affect the reality at community level. It is a tested methodologies in situations where representative sampling is impossible or impractical.	• User perspective on the changes in the quality service provision, the relevance of those changes and the role different stakeholders (including women and men, girls and boys) have played.	Originally proposed frequency: bi-annual	Originally proposed sample size was 3-4. Due to the early suspension of the programme, only 2 communities were visited for an initial dialogue.

Table 2: Methodologies that are part of VSO's regular M&E processes

Methodology	Description	Type of information gathered	Frequency of application	Sample size
Quarterly narrative reports by volunteers	Quarterly narrative reports by volunteer using a basis, standardised template	• Main activities by volunteers • Progress against placement objectives • Facilitating and impeding factors • Lessons learnt	Quarterly	All volunteers
Quarterly quantitative report by volunteers	Quarterly completion of a standardised excel spreadsheet, which feeds into a master spreadsheet/database at national level. The information is also used to inform VSO's quarterly reporting against the logframe.	• Vital statistics regarding partner organisation • Vital statistics regarding volunteer placement • Number of staff the volunteer works with directly • Outputs generated	Quarterly	All volunteers
Adapted quality scales	Adaptation of the VSO quality scale to asses changes in institutional capacity over time. In consultation with volunteer, key elements of institutional capacity were identified. For each element a 5-point scale was developed	• Changes in key area of institutional capacity	First assessment during the 3-months placement review, followed by annual assessment during Annual Partnership Review	All volunteer placements

2.5   Sampling

During the course of the research, a total of 42 volunteers and their partner organisations were interviewed periodically using the *ladders of change*. The breakdown of this sample by sector and by level of operation/type of organisation is as follows:

Table 3: Sample size, broken down by sector, type of organisation and level of operation

Type of organisation/ level of operation	Number of volunteers (education)	Number of volunteers (health)	Number of volunteers (governance)
Type of organisation/ level of operation	Education programme	Health programme	Governance programme
Government – National level	1	3	
Government – State level	4	2	
Government - County level	9	6	
Nurse training college		4	
Teacher training college	0		
CSO – National level			3
CSO - State level			5
CSO – County and community level			4
INGO	1		
TOTAL	**15**	**15**	**12**

Thirty seven of the 42 volunteer placements that were included in the sample started their placement in 2012. This represents 79% of the 47 placements that started in 2012, which makes it a highly representative sample. The focus on placements that started in 2012 enabled the researchers to assess change over time, i.e. from the start to the end of the placement.

During the course of the research, it was decided to add five placements that started in 2013 in order to 1) asses to impact of replacing a volunteer once her/his assignment is finished, and 2) to ensure that the sample adequately reflected volunteers working at the level of County Health Departments (CHDs) who were underrepresented as a result of a number of early returns.

2.6   Limitations

The suspension of VSO's programme in South Sudan in December 2013 meant that the data and information collection had to be stopped. As a result the evidence-base needed to respond to all research questions is not entirely complete. The most important gaps are the following:

≡   The sample did not include volunteers working at teacher training colleges, since these placements started later during the roll-out of VSO's programme.

- The *'choice scenarios'* in which partner organisations were given the hypothetical choice between a volunteer or US$35k, were applied to only 13 placements out of the sample of 42. This was due to the fact that most volunteers had not yet finished their placement by the time of the last round of interviews in October 2013.
- The *'what if scenarios'* in which partner organisations were asked what would be different if the volunteer had not been there, were answered for 7 placements out of the sample of 42. Again this was due to the early suspension of the programme.
- It took longer than anticipated to select and establish the sentinel communities, as volunteers needed time to build up a relationship of trust with their partner organisation and the communities served before this methodology could be applied. As a result, by December 2013 only two sentinel communities had been selected. They were paid an initial visit in October 2013 before the suspension of VSO's programme in South Sudan. As a result, there is limited information that reflects on the impact of changes in the capacity of partner organisations to deliver improved programmes and services on the reality at the level of communities.

2.7   Data and information analysis

Much of the information generated through the application of the methodologies described in 2.4 is qualitative. To analyse the wealth of information gathered over the two year period in a systematic way, NVIVO[5] software was used. Application of this software enabled the researchers to conduct a thematic content analysis of the source material as the evidence-base grew during the course of the research, picking up on emerging patterns. It informed the development of a node-structure which was used to develop the conceptual framework (see figure 1) and to code the source material accordingly.

In addition, quantitative information was obtained from VSO's volunteer database and through the quarterly reports submitted by volunteers. The quantitative quarterly reports were submitted using an excel template. The completed templates fed into a database to facilitate consolidation of data. Apart from using the data for this research project, the data were also used by VSO to report against the logframe agreed with DFID as well as its reporting to VSO headquarters.

---

[5] For more information refer to http://www.qsrinternational.com/products_nvivo.aspx?utm_source=NVivo+10+for+Mac

3 Volunteering for development in South Sudan

3.1 The socio-political context of South Sudan

During the three year period that followed the proclamation of independence of South Sudan in 2011 the socio-political situation in South Sudan changed dramatically. Section 3.1.1 describes the situation at the time of the start of VSO's programme in South Sudan, while section 3.1.2 summarises the conflict that started in December 2013 which led to the suspension of VSO's programme.

3.1.1 The context for health, education and civil society

VSO South Sudan entered the country at a time of a 'human capital crisis' where the demands for modernisation and development were being placed on the shoulders of a fragmented, under-educated and inexperienced population. The challenges for development in the country were and remain substantial, with South Sudan having some of the world's worst development statistics[6]:

- **Health and education:** Decades of war have left a legacy of chronic poverty, inequality, and high unemployment. South Sudan has the highest maternal mortality rates globally. Less than half of children enrol in primary school and fewer than one in ten girls who do enrol complete primary school. Literacy levels are chronically low, especially for women.

- **Institutions:** The state does not have the capable, accountable and responsive systems and institutions needed to manage economic growth and deliver services to people. Although basic structures have been established, delivery systems are largely absent or dysfunctional. Corruption is a serious problem. The SPLA – the strongest institution in the country – was also the biggest provider of education and health facilities, with one in every eight South Sudanese estimated to be dependent on SPLA resources[7]. Institutions for teacher and nurse training have had to be re-established as well as separated from the national institutions (based in Khartoum) of which they were once a part.

- **Security:** Years of conflict have left South Sudan's society highly militarised, and fragmented. Arms are readily available; armed rebel groups are active; and inter-communal violence and cattle-raiding causes local insecurity and suffering. Long term stability will require the transition from a patronage based state to a more inclusive political settlement. Disillusionment is high and the risk of renewed conflict over access to resources or power, identified by DFID and other actors in 2011, has been borne out by the rapid descent into civil war since mid-December 2013, focussed on a power struggle within the SPLM, and over access to 'black gold' oil resources in the north of the country

The period around independence, however, was also a period of opportunity - with returning diaspora, and a strong motivation from South Sudanese to build the new country. This was visible not only in the building of newly independent Ministries and the gradual investment in

> A colleague at one of the County Education Offices: "We are not education experts. We were freedom fighters and are new in our jobs".

---

[6] Adapted and expanded from DFID (2011). South Sudan Operational Plan 2011-2015. UK, DFID.

[7] Data from Security and Defence Transformation Programme, September 2013.

infrastructure, it was also visible in a growing civil society sector.

Service provision represented an important element of the social contract between the people of South Sudan and their government. People had high expectations of the new government. It was hoped that improving the provision and coverage of health and education services could help to reduce grievances around inequality of access and enhance citizen perceptions of the performance and legitimacy of the government.

Many organisations, especially international non-government organisations (INGOs), had been engaged in service delivery. Nevertheless, the service delivery challenge remained daunting because of the sheer extent of coverage that is required (both in terms of financial resources and geographical coverage in a country with hardly any infrastructure, beset by insecurity in some areas).To deliver these services, South Sudan had and continues to have a need for large numbers of skilled personnel from outside the country to help develop a much larger cadre of skilled South Sudanese officials and service delivery staff. This need remains acute, and is likely to have increased as a result of the recent conflict. There is therefore a need to train enough South Sudanese with the technical and management skills to enable them to manage and deliver basic services in the country and – over time - to reduce the current degree of dependence on donor and INGO expertise.[8]

> Ministry of Education at State level: "In South Sudan we are starting from nothing – we are starting to build up institutions after a long and destructive civil war – we appreciate having international experts who support us technically and have solidarity with us in starting to build our nation".

The development of civil society in South Sudan was profoundly shaped by the previous war between north and south Sudan – with the churches being the primary providers of health and education in the country during the war. Numerous small to medium-sized NGOs evolved from within the displaced Southern Sudanese population in the North, as refugees in Kenya and Uganda – and at community-level within South Sudan. Both the elections for the Southern Sudan Government in 2010 and the Referendum in early 2011, provided important rallying points for an emerging national network of South Sudanese CSOs working in the area of governance – demonstrating high levels of interest and enthusiasm not yet matched with the required capacity to organise and deliver. During this period, newspapers also flourished.

While visibility of women is not equal to men in society, there are a number of women-led CSOs in South Sudan, and women are more vocal than in Ethiopia, for example. Nevertheless, the voice of women and girls is limited in the country and the predominantly male leadership do not respond well to pressure to increase gender equality.

Predictable concern about the role that CSOs might come to play in holding an authoritarian and un-transparent government to account also contributed to the development of legislation (known as the 'NGO Bill')[9] designed to curb the role of both INGOs and local CSOs funded or supported through

---

[8] Adapted from DFID (2014). Annual Review of VSO South Sudan. South Sudan, DFID.

[9] According to a Civicus (Press Release Nov 29th 2013) The Voluntary and Non-Governmental Humanitarian Organizations Bill narrowly defines the scope of civil society organisations' activities to exclude key areas such as tackling corruption, promoting good governance and advocating against human rights violations.

external resources. The Law had not been fully implemented by the time the conflict broke out in December 2013.

3.1.2   The conflict in December 2013

A fractious debate within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) on the party's future led to a fight on December 15th 2013 between factions within the Republican Guard. Over the course of the following month, this escalated into a full-blown conflict that has wracked the country, resulting in the deaths of an estimated 10,000 people and an emerging humanitarian crisis which now threatens to kill many more. Over one million people have been displaced. The scale and nature of the fighting has exposed deep-rooted tensions under the skin of the newly independent country, unacknowledged and unaddressed since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

What started as a political crisis within the SPLM has brought the country yet again into civil war – its first real challenge as a sovereign state attempting to consolidate authority and establish a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. The newly independent state has fractured, pitting communities against each other, splintering the factionalised security forces and setting up a dichotomised political space in which hard boundaries have been drawn between pro- and anti-government camps (Hutton 2014).

Despite the gap between ambition and capacity, and the impact of the current civil war on the operating environment for CSOs, sections of South Sudanese civil society have proved remarkably resilient. From the outset, a number of CSOs ensured that they were present and participating in the peace discussions in Addis Abeba – and obtained support for this both from the Ethiopian government through the chair of the International Authority on Development (IGAD), and from members of Ethiopian civil society. With the support of others, they have continued to insist on broader participation in the processes now required to re-stabilise the country – as reflected in a press released by IGAD on 3 June 2014 (IGAD 2014).

3.2   DFID's programme in South Sudan

Until December 2013, the UK was the second largest OECD bilateral donor in South Sudan after the USA, aiming to follow best practice aid effectiveness principles for working in fragile states, and supporting work towards a compact between the government and donors as proposed in the New Deal agreed at Busan in December 2011 (High level forum on aid effectiveness 2011). Despite the surprise with which events in December 2013 took the international community (and the South Sudanese themselves), DFID's Operational Plan (DFID 2011) drafted at the time of independence in 2011 indicates that the British Government was already 'extremely concerned' about the fragility and unpredictability of the country once the short independence honeymoon drew to a close. It was understood that South Sudan was an expensive and high risk environment for development programming, but that the potential return on investments could also be very high, given that the human and economic costs of a return to a full scale war would be enormous.

Noting in particular the oil-fuelled overspending and corruption, and the need for wise investment in strengthened government systems, infrastructure and human capacity, DFID's strategic objective for South Sudan over the period 2011-2015 was to help the country establish stronger foundations for progress with sustainable peace and development. In 2012 DFID began support for protecting access to health and education, and also to increase its investment in governance-related work.

DFID chose not to channel money through the government in South Sudan, instead routing funds through NGOs, private sector firms and multilateral agencies that have robust financial management systems – including VSO South Sudan and its nascent programme. DFID's support focussed on five

pillars: 1) strengthening security and access to justice and preventing conflict; 2) improving service delivery and health and education to transform opportunities for a generation of girls; 3) support to improve food security, create jobs and promote wealth creation; 4) building accountable, capable and responsive government with a strong focus on tackling corruption, and 5) standing ready to provide humanitarian assistance in response to needs.

The obvious focus for the relationship between DFID and VSO was education and health, where DFID sought to achieve the following by 2015:

Table 4: Expected results of DFID's programme in South Sudan, 2011-2015

Strategic priority	Indicator	Baseline/year	Expected results
Education	Number of children supported by DFID in primary education	0 (2011)	2 million (2015) of which 793,000 girls
	Number of textbooks printed and distributed	0 (2011)	9.4 million (2015)
Health	Couple years of protection delivered through DFID funding (i.e. years of protection from unintended pregnancy for one couple)	0 (2011)	143,000 (2015)
	Number of people reached with one or more malaria prevention or treatment interventions through DFID support in South Sudan	0 (2011)	762 000 (2015), of which 365,000 girls and women

DFID South Sudan has supported service delivery through multi-donor funds, including the DFID-led Basic Services Fund (BSF), covering health, education and water and sanitation; and the Multi-Donor Trust Fund, covering the same sectors (as well as others), managed by the World Bank. Both programmes ended on 31 December 2012. These programmes have trained teachers and health workers, but there are gaps in long- term systematic capacity building to improve government service delivery, especially working to improve the quality of service provision, the management of health and education facilities, and accountability at local level (state and county). This provided a natural entry point for VSO South Sudan – through the provision of £5.9 million over three years to cover 70 volunteers to improve the quality of health and education provision and the development of voice for civil society, especially for women and vulnerable people.

VSO South Sudan was therefore in a good position to link an intervention that focuses on improving quality of provision with existing and new programmes in health and education such as DFID's national Girls Education project and the DFID-led Health Pooled Fund (HPF) for six States. The intervention also focused on especially increasing women's and vulnerable people's voice in seeking accountability at local level (State and County) feeding into DFID South Sudan's objectives on gender, equity and on wider governance objectives such as securing equitable access to security and justice.

3.3   VSO's programme in South Sudan

3.3.1   Background

Soon after the declaration of independence in 2011, VSO started its programme in South Sudan with the first volunteers arriving at their placement in January 2012. It reflected VSO's commitment to increase its focus on low-income countries and fragile states. The programme was largely funded by

the Department for International Development (DFID) with a total budget of £5.9 million over a three year period (2012-2014)[10].

Through the placement of international volunteers, VSO aimed to deliver the following outcomes:
- Partner organisations have the human resources and adequate management capacity to deliver quality services in education and health.
- Civil Society Organisation partners have improved management capacity and are better positioned to hold the government to account.

To that effect VSO developed the following three programmes:
1. **Education**: Strengthening the Ministry of Education (MOE) at County, State and National level, as well as support to teacher training colleges.
2. **Health**: Strengthening the Ministry of Health (MOH) at County, State and National level, as well as support to nurse training colleges.
3. **Governance**: Strengthening the capacity of South Sudanese Civil Society Organisations at community, County, State and National level.

Initially VSO struggled to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers to fill the placements identified. This was largely due to the security situation in country and the attention this received in the international media. However, a change in the recruitment process, as well the possibility to shorten placements to one year rather than the standard two years, meant that VSO was able to recruit and place a total of 81 international volunteers[11] in five States[12] during the period 2012-2013. The map page 18 shows the extensive network of international volunteers placed by VSO during the 2012-2013 period.

During the two year programme the VSO programme grew rapidly, from an organisation that previously did not have a presence in South Sudan to a well-established INGO that was recognised by South Sudanese organisations as well as INGOs and UN agencies.

However, with the start of the conflict on 15 December 2013, VSO had to evacuate all volunteers and its staff out of the country. At the time of closure, 52 volunteer placements were active in country.

In the hope that the situation would soon normalise, VSO and DFID waited for three months before making a final decision with regard to the future of the programme. As there were no significant signs of improvement in the security situation, in March 2014 VSO and DFID agreed to suspend the programme. Following suspension of the programme VSO decided to keep one Programme Manager in-country to monitor the situation in anticipation of future opportunities to restart the programme.

---

[10] In addition to DFID's support, 11 volunteer placements were partially or fully funded by the EU.

[11] This does *not* include the volunteers who came out specifically to support VSO in the identification of placements and the preparation of placement descriptions. Furthermore, a number of short term volunteers came out more than once to support the same partner organisation. These have volunteers have been counted as one.

[12] Volunteers were located in the States of Central Equatoria CES), Eastern Equatoria (EES), Western Equatoria (WES), Lakes and Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBG).

Distribution of volunteers
across South Sudan by sector

	Volunteer placements with national remit	Western Bahr el Ghazal	Western Equatoria State	Central Equatoria State	Eastern Equatoria State	Lakes	Total
Education	11	4	6	5	6	2	34
Health	13	4	2	7	3	2	31
Governance	3	4	3	1	3	2	16

Figure 2: Volunteer placements across South Sudan

3.3.2 Characteristics of VSO's portfolio of partner organisations and volunteers

Between January 2012 and December 2013, VSO placed 81 international volunteers [13]. The tables in this section show the characteristics of VSO's portfolio of volunteers and partner organisations during this period:

Table 5: Volunteer portfolio, broken down by sector, type of organisation and level of operation

Type of organisation/ level of operation	Number of volunteers (education)	Number of volunteers (health)	Number of volunteers (governance)
Government – National level: # (%)	7 (21%)	3 (10%)	
Government – State level: # (%)	8 (24%)	5 (16%)	
Government - County level: # (%)	15 (44%)	14 (45%)	
Nurse training college a/o hospital: # (%)		9 (29%)	
Teacher training college: # (%)	3 (9%)		
CSO – National level: # (%)			3 (19%)
CSO - State level: # (%)			6 (38%)
CSO – County and community level: # (%)			7 (44%)
INGO: # (%)	1 (3%)		
TOTAL	**34**	**31**	**16**

Table 6 provides a breakdown of the volunteer portfolio by gender and age group[14] for each programme. It reflects the high level of experience volunteers bring to their placement.

Table 6: Volunteer portfolio by programme, gender and age category

	Education	Health	Governance
# female volunteers (%)	16 (47%)	17 (55%)	11 (69%)
# male volunteers (%)	18 (53%)	14 (45%)	5 (31%)
Age group: 21-30 # (%)	1 (3%)	5 (16%)	4 (25%)
Age group: 31-40 # (%)	8 (24%)	11 (35%)	6 (38%)
Age group: 41-50 # (%)	8 (24%)	3 (10%)	4 (25%)

---

[13] While globally VSO promotes both national and international volunteering, in case of its programme in South Sudan in 2012-2013, the focus was on international volunteers only.

[14] Age measured as at the start of the placement

Age group: 51-60 # (%)	10 (29%)	6 (19%)	1 (6%)
Age group:61-70 # (%)	7 (21%)	6 (19%)	1 (6%)
Average age at start of placement (years)	52	44	38

Table 7 provides a breakdown of the volunteer portfolio by nationality. It reflects the important role volunteers from neighbouring countries, Kenya and Uganda, play in the delivery of VSO's programme, in particular in education and in health.

Table 7: Volunteer portfolio by programme and region of origin

	Education	Health	Governance
Africa: # (%)	13 (38%)	7 (23%)	0 (0%)
North America: # (%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)
Asia: # (%)	4 (12%)	1 (3%)	2 (13%)
Europe: # (%)	17 (50%)	22 (71%)	14 (88%)
Total: #	34	31	16

3.3.3   Placement characteristics

When VSO established its programme in South Sudan, originally the aim was for the majority of international volunteer placements to be for a duration of two years. These 2-year placements would be complemented with a smaller number of short-term placements (less than one year) for very specific assignments.

In 2012, however, VSO realised that it would be difficult to recruit international volunteers for the duration of two years. The hardship of the operating environment, combined with concerns about the security situation in South Sudan, meant that many aspiring volunteers were reluctant to make a 2-year commitment, resulting in recruitment numbers significantly below target as well a last-minute withdrawals.

To address this situation, VSO realised that it had to become more flexible by offering aspiring volunteers the opportunity to change 2-year placements into 1-year placements. This, combined with more direct and personalised support during the process of preparation, meant that recruitment numbers increased and VSO was able to deliver the number of placements targeted as per the agreement with DFID.

Table 8: Number and percentage of volunteer placements by placement duration

Placement duration	Education	Health	Governance	Total
0-3 months	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
4-6 months	2 (6%)	1 (3%)	1 (6%)	4 (5%)
7-12 months	7 (20%)	13 (42%)	2 (13%)	22 (27%)
13-18 months	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	2 (2%)

| 19-24 months | 23 (68%) | 17 (55%) | 12 (75%) | 52 (64%) |
| Average anticipated duration | 19 months | 18 months | 21 months | 19 months |

Three short-term volunteers came back after finishing their first assignment. This proved particularly important to ensure continuity of the policy-related work that they had started.

As many of the placements that started in 2012 were about to come to an end, some volunteers were considering extending their placement. Their final decision, however, was overtaken by the decision to suspend the entire programme.

During the 2012-2013 period 13 volunteers returned early before completing their placement. The number of early returns is reflected in the following table:

Table 9: Number of volunteers returning early before completing their placement

	Education	Health	Governance	All programmes
Number of early returns	5	4	4	13

While many volunteers were based in Juba and the five State capitals, a considerable number of volunteers were based in remote locations. This applied in particular to those volunteers working at County and community level. Given the lack of infrastructure in country, many of these Country and community level placements were very isolated.

4   Findings in response to the research questions

Chapter 4 responds to the research questions set out by VSO at the start of its programme in South Sudan. The headings of the sections that follow reflect the headings under which the research questions have been classified (see 2.2).

4.1   Role and contribution of VSO in the broader development context of South-Sudan

Research questions identified by VSO:

≡   What is VSO's role as perceived by VSO, its partners and other development actors?

≡   What is the relevance of VSO in the context of South Sudan?

≡   What is VSO's niche in the context of South Sudan?

VSO's focus on education and health clearly responds to both the acute and long terms needs identified following the independence of South Sudan in 2011, as highlighted in the situation analysis in Chapter 3. By placing volunteers at County, State and National level, VSO made a significant contribution to strengthening the capacities at each level, as well as the synergies between the different levels, as will be explored in Section 4.4.

An additional sector that was considered during the design of VSO's programme in South Sudan was sustainable livelihoods, with a strong focus on young people. In the end VSO decided against it, due to the challenges of marketing products as a result of logistical situation in country. Nevertheless, through the placement of some volunteers with community level CSOs, there has been some involvement in agricultural initiatives including the production of cash crops.

VSO's investment in strengthening the capacity of CSOs was done with the long term view that CSOs at different levels play a key role in accountability processes that are an important part of democratic society. The role of strong CSOs is becoming evident during the peace negotiations that are currently taking place. While the initial focus of most volunteers in the governance programme was on strengthening the capacity of CSOs themselves, by the end of 2013 there were initial indications that some volunteers were getting involved in the facilitation of improved collaboration between their CSOs and government institutions.

Given the very weak and fragmented status of government institutions across South Sudan, and the need for strong CSOs, VSO's focus on and approach to capacity building is particularly relevant in the context of South Sudan as it generates results at three levels:

≡   Stronger institutions that can deliver quality programmes and services.
≡   Improved capacity of *existing* cadre.
≡   Development of *new* cadre through VSO's involvement in the training of new teachers and nurses.

The scope of VSO's efforts to strengthen the capacity, and the extent to which VSO's approach to capacity building has been successful will be explored in more detail in section 4.4.

In addition to its role in education, health and governance, VSO played another important role in South Sudan. Apart from United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Faith-Based organisations (FBOs), VSO was one of the first larger V4D organisations to open a programme in South Sudan. In a context where the aid sector is largely dominated by INGOs that focus on emergency relief, VSO played a pioneering role by exploring the possibility of placing volunteers within South Sudanese organisations. Its efforts resulted in the recognition of V4D as a viable and effective approach, both among partner

organisations that directly benefitted from the placement of volunteers as well as other partner organisations, as reflected in the following quotes:

- VSO partner organisation: "We are lucky to have harnessed experienced volunteers. For us, its' more than monetary contribution to our work. There is need to partner with VSO to strengthen institutions in South Sudan, to expand the scope of thinking and accommodate institutional strengthening."

- UN representative: "What makes VSO unique is that it puts technical capacity at local level. As people move up in their career, they end up being further removed from the field. VSO reverses this".

An important strength is the fact that VSO works *within* the agenda of the partner organisation, rather than imposing its own development agenda. VSO takes it to a depth that most other organisations don't, because the volunteer placements operate without gain for the individual. This approach strengthens local ownership of the development agenda in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (OECD 2005), the Istanbul CSO development Effectiveness Principles (Open Forum 2010), and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (High level forum on aid effectiveness 2011).

While other development agencies recognise the value of placing qualified volunteers within South Sudanese structures, increasingly they also recognise the benefit for their own organisation. A number of development agencies commented on the fact that access to and collaboration with the South Sudanese partner organisation had improved since the arrival of the volunteer. Furthermore a number of partner organisations mentioned that the inside information obtained through the volunteer help them pitch their input at the right level. Vice versa, volunteers commented on the fact that the inputs from other development agencies were essential to get things moving, in particular following the introduction of an austerity budget in 2012. In the case of two placements at County Health Department level, there was reference to potential competition and duplication of effort between VSO and other development agencies in relation to the Health Pooled Fund.

The synergy between DFID's and VSO's programmes further strengthened the relevance of placing volunteers with South Sudanese partner organisations. As became evident during the interviews conducted in 2013 in particular, an increasing number of volunteers in education and in health got involved in the preparation and roll-out of large DFID-funded initiatives such as the Girls Education project and the Health Pooled Fund. Volunteers provided technical expertise and local intelligence to facilitate the implementation of these initiatives. They also played a key role in facilitating the communication and synergies between County, State and National level.

Despite the suspension of VSO's programme, the relevance of VSO's programme, and in particular its approach to capacity building of partner organisations remains. Once stability returns to South Sudan, the type of support provided by VSO will be needed more than ever before.

4.2 Process of engagement between VSO and partner organisations

Research questions identified by VSO:

≡ What is the process?

≡ How do partners perceive the quality of the process?

≡ How does the process contribute to VSO's accountability to partners?

Building a new programme from scratch in an entirely new environment is challenging in any situation. It becomes even more challenging in a context where the development scene has been dominated by

emergency relief; where V4D is a new concept[15]; where VSO is unknown; where potential partner organisations are extremely weak, lack leadership, structure and organisation; and where there are very significant logistical and security challenges to be dealt with. This is further compounded by the difficulty in recruiting qualified volunteers who were prepared to commit themselves to living and working in South Sudan for a prolonged period of time.

Despite these enormous challenges VSO succeeded in developing a programme from scratch which resulted in the placement of 81 highly experienced volunteers in a period of less than two years. To make this very significant achievement a reality, VSO had to strike a balance between trying to implement an ideal process of engagement with aspiring partner organisations on the one hand, and getting volunteers in place as soon as possible to demonstrate the potential and added value of V4D in practice. As a result, preparation of the first batches of volunteer placements was not always optimal. In particular in the case of placements at County level and with smaller CSOs, the first groups of volunteers faced significant challenges, with partner organisations not being adequately prepared for the opportunity the placement of a volunteer offers. In some cases the partner organisation hardly knew when the volunteer would be arriving, in other cases the partner organisation did not have any or very unrealistic expectations. It is to the credit of these volunteers that the majority stayed and succeeded in shaping their assignment in a way that was meaningful for the partner organisations as well as the volunteers themselves. It required a very high level of adaptability.

Over time, as VSO got to know the country context and the organisational reality of potential partner organisations, and as VSO became better known itself, and increased its operational capacity, the process of engagement improved. Having volunteers on the ground who clearly demonstrated the added value of V4D, played a key role in developing a better understanding of V4D among aspiring partner organisations. Furthermore, the gradual increase in Country Office staff enabled the Country Director and Programme Managers to spend more time with partner organisations.

> One partner organisation commented the following on VSO's partnership development: "You [i.e. the partner organisation itself] are driving it. VSO asks you what your problem is. What kind of person do you want to help you address the problem? This is different from other organisations who identify your problems and then send in their consultant. It obviously requires to have done some thorough analysis yourself".

While the time spent on the preparation of volunteer placements and the provision of operational support to volunteers increased, the opportunities for programme staff to manage a programme, rather than a portfolio of individual volunteer placements, continued to be limited until the suspension of VSO's programmes. In practice, this often meant a suboptimal use of opportunities for networking, learning, and policy development, building on the results generated by volunteers across the country. One CSO partner commented on the impressive network that VSO had built up in less than two years, but the limited use of this network in support of its partner organisations.

The above analysis highlights the need to revisit staff-volunteer ratios when opening new programmes, in particular in post-conflict situations. A phased approach, where the initial focus is on 1-2 States only, would make it a more manageable process where adequate time can be spent on the preparation of and support to volunteer placements, as well as on strategic programme management, including networking, learning and policy development. At the same time, it should be emphasised

---

[15] In South Sudan 'volunteering' is often associated with the war, during which many people volunteered their services and food for the war effort.

that strategic programme management is not just the responsibility of the Country Office. Volunteers can and do play a key role in this, in particular when they are placed in geographical clusters.

4.3 Volunteering for development: inputs

Research questions identified by VSO:

≡ What are the VSO main inputs into the partnership

≡ How do partners perceive the quality of VSO's inputs?

≡ What is the relevance of the inputs against the backdrop of key change processes at the level of partner organisations?

The provision of highly qualified volunteers is VSO's main input into the partnership. The work of the volunteers, however, is facilitated by other inputs, small grants in particular. In addition to VSO's inputs, inputs by other organisations play an important role.

4.3.1 Volunteer inputs

Professional experience and expertise

Table 6 in Section 3.3.2 shows the distribution of volunteers by age category. The distribution and average age reflect the high level of professional experience that volunteers bring to the partner organisation. In the vast majority of volunteer placements, partner organisations recognised the quality of professional input provided by the volunteer. Only in a very few cases were concerns raised about the technical competence of the volunteer – in two cases this led to an early return.

Without prompting, many of the volunteers commented on the fact that they felt that their expertise was underutilised by the partner organisation. From reading the placement description, they had had the impression that the placement would be technically demanding. In most cases, however, the volunteers had to adjust their level and pace of input and focus on the very basics. It reflects the organisational reality of a country beset by war for many decades in which the state does not have the capable, accountable and responsive systems and institutions needed to manage economic growth and deliver services to people. Bringing about change in such organisational environment is a slow process, where the initial focus is on putting in place and strengthening the very basic structures.

Attributes of volunteering

At least as important as the technical skills are therefore the personal attributes that volunteers bring to the partnership. Through the analysis of the interviews with the 42 partner organisations included in the sample, a large number of attributes were identified that are considered important for the effective functioning of volunteers. The most frequently mentioned attributes can be summarised under the following headings:

- Approachability, accessibility and openness
- Building relationships - trust
- Commitment and motivation
- Adaptability and integration
- Teamwork and collaboration
- Role model
- Presence in the office, rather than "passing through"
- Hands-on, can-do attitude

- The approach to coaching
- Listening and learning
- Patience
- Leading a simple life style
- Willingness to spend time in the field
- Taking initiative
- Working with and within the agenda of the partner organisation
- Persistence

While some of these attributes reflect the personality of the volunteer, many of the above attributes are inherent to volunteering. They are a manifestation of the spirit of volunteering which is based in equality, mutuality and solidarity. It highlights the importance of building relationships that is at the heart of V4D.

> A colleague: "The volunteer staying with the community or partner makes a very big difference. [She] lives in the compound, eats our food, drinks from the same flask, plays badminton".

> Head of nurse training: **"Nursing in South Sudan with the inadequate facilities, equipment and stocks of drugs is very challenging and requires a high level of commitment and dedication. By demonstrating this as a volunteer nurse who works very hard, he has been an excellent role model for the students".

A factor that has affected the effectiveness of volunteers is language. While the majority of volunteers were able to operate effectively using English, the dependence on English became more problematic for volunteers working in Western Bahr El Ghazal. In particular at County level, the use of English among their counterparts was often very limited and in some cases non-existent. While VSO made some provision for Arabic language training this was not sufficient for volunteers to become sufficiently fluent in a short period of time. In addition, in the case of two volunteers there were concerns about their level of English.

The word cloud on page 27 provides a visual representation of the key attributes and their relative weight as measured by the number of volunteer placements for which they were identified by the partner organisation.

Figure 3: Key volunteer attributes

accessibility-openness adaptation-integration age anticipate approach-to-problem-solving coaching commitment-motivation consultation empathy energy enthusiasm facilitation fieldwork flexibility gender hands-on initiative integration language listening patience persistence positive-attitude presence professional-experience returned-volunteer role-model sharing-ideas simple-lifestyle team-work trust walks-the-talk working-within-workplan-of-partner

Prepared using www.tagcrowd.com

The role of gender

The extent to which gender of the volunteer played a role generated a mixed response.

Even when prompted, many partner organisations did not consider gender of the volunteer important. When asked about the key factors that contribute to the volunteer's effectiveness, they focussed on the professional skills and personal attributes, rather than the gender of the volunteer.

A few volunteers, however, commented on the fact that being female helped them break through the barriers of hierarchy more easily. Had they been male, they thought they would have been perceived as competition, in particular in male-dominated government institutions. One volunteer, however, mentioned her impression that being a female foreigner at times became an obstacle in accepting her suggestions.

While gender of the volunteer was not considered relevant for many placements, one area where gender seemed to make a difference was among education volunteers working at County level. With the strong promotion of girls education and the roll-out of large donor-funded programmes in this area, female volunteers in particular were able to develop a strong relationship with the gender inspectors and often served as a role model. There are strong examples where female volunteers, in collaboration with teachers and the gender inspector, succeeded in organising sessions on girls education that were well attended by both girls and their mothers.

One male volunteer working as a tutor in a nursing college was perceived as an important role model for male students, since all the other tutors were nuns.

The fact that gender of the volunteer was generally not perceived as important by VSO's counterpart organisations, it is likely to be a reflection of the fact that outsiders are perceived differently. Within the counterpart organisations themselves there is often a strong gender hierarchy and imbalance. Having female volunteers may help change some of the gender stereotypes that exist.

The role of age

In case of five placements out of the sample of 42, age was mentioned as an important attribute. It was associated with professional authority and maturity, in particular among government officials. As one respondent put it: "Young people may get disappointed". In case of one CSO partner, however, the situation was the opposite: "South Sudanese women, because of the culture, tend to keep quiet and not participate when they are interacting with men or people who are older than them. Having someone our age made us feel able to engage openly and frankly with the volunteer".

Duration of placement

As mentioned in Section 3.3 VSO's original intention was for the majority of volunteer placements to have a standard duration of two years. However, in order to recruit sufficient numbers of qualified volunteers, it had to be more flexible by offering the possibility of one year assignments. In addition, for a number of very specific assignment VSO recruited short term volunteers as reflected in Table 7.

Both partner organisations and volunteers recognise the benefit of two year placements, in particular as the effectiveness of volunteers depends so much on the building of relationships and developing an understanding of the partner organisation: "It takes three months for the volunteer to understand the situation. ……. A two-year placements would have been more cost-effective". Even when a replacement arrives in time to have overlap with her or his predecessor, the interviews showed that the continuity of some of the work set in motion was affected.

Most partner organisations interviewed emphasised the significant added value of having a volunteer working *within* the organisation for a *prolonged* period of time. They saw this type of input as significantly more beneficial than having the occasional technical input provided by outsiders (consultants in particular).

In 2012-213 VSO placed a total of twelve volunteers for a period of less than 12 months. In most cases these volunteers were recruited to address a specific need or develop a specific project, usually at policy level. According to the agreement between VSO and DFID, in most cases short-term placements would be placed in organisations where VSO had an existing long-term volunteer who could build on the short-term outputs. This aspiration did not always materialise, as a result of which the adoption and/or roll-out of the products developed by short-term volunteers could not be guaranteed. Due to the lack of programme capacity, the Country Office itself was not able to provide the technical and political support required to ensure the continuity. To mitigate this situation, a number of short-term volunteers returned to South Sudan for a second short-term assignment.

4.3.2 Other VSO inputs

In addition to qualified and highly committed volunteers, VSO's made a number of significant inputs into the partnership.

The provision of small grants to volunteers and their partner organisations played a key role in facilitating the work of the volunteers and their counterparts. With the introduction of an austerity budget in 2012, the operations of many government departments ground to a halt. Money for training and transport dried up and even paper for printing was no longer available. This situation clearly backfired on the work of the volunteers and their counterparts. To mitigate this situation, VSO disbursed small grants with a total value of GBP46k. The small grants were used for a range of purposes, including transport, training, IT connectivity, etc.

Another important input that was made in 2013 was the provision of motor-bikes, in particular for volunteers working at County and community level. The provision of transport facilities to increase their mobility was an essential investment to increase the action radius and effectiveness of volunteers and their counterparts. Education volunteers, for example, were able to visit and support schools outside the County town.

The importance of these practical inputs to facilitate the volunteers' work and to increase the effectiveness of their placement cannot be overemphasised.

An area of concern that was expressed by a number of volunteers, and in some cases their partner organisations, was security. VSO made some adjustments, e.g. by introducing satellite phones in key locations, but the investment in security was relatively modest compared to the arrangements made by other organisations. The current conflict highlights the volatility of fragile states and the need to be prepared for extreme scenarios.

An additional input that may need to be considered should the programme in South Sudan resume, is the provision of training in proposal development to volunteers. For many volunteers their experience in South Sudan is the first experience of working overseas in international development. To help overcome the resource constraints of their partner organisations, many volunteers get involved in proposal development. The provision of basic skills in proposal development would enhance their success rate in securing funding to facilitate their work and that of the counterpart organisation.

4.3.3 Inputs provided by other organisations

Before the start of the conflict in December 2013 a large number of international development organisations were working in South Sudan, ranging from large institutional donors to INGOs and Faith-based organisations. During interviews with partner organisations and volunteers, the importance of the inputs provided through these organisations was frequently referred to, ranging from large grants to small injections of funding in support of a particular activity. While the provision of their inputs was sometimes ad hoc, it helped create a certain momentum that facilitated the work of the volunteers and their counterparts, in particular for placements with the government institutions after the introduction of the austerity budget.

Without these additional inputs, and the small grants provided by VSO, many volunteers would not have been able to operate. It highlights the need for minimum operational costs to be covered to make the placement of a volunteer a worthwhile investment.

4.4 Volunteering for development: outcomes

Research questions identified by VSO:

≡ What are the changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviours at the level of colleagues/counterparts

≡ What are the changes in capacity and services provided by partner organisations

≡ What are the changes as a result of VSO-supported advocacy initiatives? What is VSO's contribution to these changes?

≡ What factors influence these changes?

As highlighted in the situation analysis in chapter 3, VSO's programme responded to the need to strengthen the capacity of government institutions and CSOs to deliver improved services and

programmes to the citizens of South Sudan, by placing 81 volunteers with South Sudanese organisations at different levels. The outcomes generated through these placements can be classified under the following headings:

≡ Outcomes at the level of counterparts
≡ Outcomes at institutional level
≡ Outcomes at the level of service provision
≡ Outcomes at policy level

4.4.1 Changes at the level of counterparts

The most immediate effect of the placement of volunteers is at the level of the colleagues or counterparts they work with on a regular basis. By working directly with South Sudanese colleagues, volunteers made a significant contribution to the further development of existing cadre of South Sudanese officials and service delivery staff.

The following table shows the average number of South Sudanese colleagues volunteers worked with on a regular basis, disaggregated by gender and sector. It provides an indication of the number of South Sudanese staff who benefitted from regular coaching by volunteers.

Table 10: Average number of South Sudanese volunteers work with on a regular basis

	Education	Health	Governance
Average number of *female* staff per volunteer (FY2013-2014)	5 female staff	4 female staff	4 female staff
Average number of **male** staff per volunteer (FY2013-2014)	8 male staff	10 male staff	7 male staff
Average number of **female and male** staff per volunteer (FY2013-2014)	13 female and male staff	14 female and male staff	11 female and male staff

The imbalance between female and male counterparts reflects the reality of most organisations in South Sudan, which are largely male-dominated. Looking at the student ratio in education and nurse training institutes (see table 12 on page 33), this is unlikely to change in the near future, in particular in the health sector.

When looking at the types of skills transferred through coaching by volunteers, a distinction can be made between 'hard' and 'soft' skills. Interviews among the 42 partner organisations highlighted a combination of hard and soft skills which are captured in the following table:

Table 11: Reported hard and soft skills transferred through coaching by volunteers

Hard development skills:	Soft development skills:
Hard development outcomes – generic: ≡ Improved general management skills, including planning; preparation and facilitation of meetings; monitoring and evaluation; and reporting. ≡ Improved human resource management, including the development of organograms, job descriptions and some initial attempts to introduce a performance appraisal system. ≡ Financial management skills ≡ Coordination and networking ≡ Fund-raising skills ≡ ICT skills **Hard development outcomes – sector specific** ≡ **Education related skills:** 1. School administration 2. Schools inspection 3. Teacher training 4. Strengthening of Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) 5. Data collection, analysis and use through the E-MIS 6. Promotion of girls education ≡ **Health related skills:** 1. Nurse training 2. Supervision of health centres 3. Engagement with the Health Pooled Fund 4. Data collection, analysis and use through the H-MIS 5. Some training of Community Health Committees ≡ **Governance related skills:** 1. Strategic Planning 2. Advocacy 3. Monitoring and evaluation	**Soft development outcomes:** ≡ Increased morale, motivation and energy. ≡ Team work ≡ More consultative work processes ≡ Ownership and self-reliance ≡ Access to information ≡ Increased sense of direction ≡ Better time management ≡ Better management of meetings ≡ Self-confidence ≡ Sharing of ideas ≡ Increased commitment ≡ Analytical approach to problem solving

When looking at the hard skills identified in Table 11, it is remarkable that many of the hard skills identified are generic, rather than sector-specific. It reflects the general need among both governmental and non-governmental partner organisations to get basic components of organisational management in place, such as planning, human resource management, etc. As a result, the initial

focus of many volunteers was on general management rather than the transfer of sector-specific skills. It reflects the need to strengthen the basic structures.

When analysing the development skills that have been transferred through the placement of volunteers with partner organisations in South Sudan, one could argue that the hard development skills are not different from the skills transfer other development agencies aim to pursue. There are, however, a number of key differences:

≡ In the first instance, the *way* skills are transferred is significantly different from skills transfer through standard training. Having a volunteer working within the partner organisation itself, means that the skills transfer is much more gradual, with continuous support and reinforcement. Partner organisations and their staff see this is one of the important differences between VSO and other development agencies.

≡ Secondly, through their understanding of the context and the capacities of their counterparts, volunteers are able to pitch their inputs at the right level. During the interviews, many volunteers commented on the fact that they had to adjust their expectations and level of input on a very regular basis.

> Colleagues at a County Education Office: "The volunteer is an expert in education, we are school leavers and have had to learn on the job so he has been training us. …… The volunteer has been coaching us in how to use the computers and English to prepare written documents like letters and reports".

> "Punctuality and attendance has improved at the office. We started coming to work because we felt embarrassed that [the volunteer] was coming to the office early and every day! We offered him the keys to open the office in the morning and close it when he leaves, but he refused so we spend more time in the office now".

≡ Thirdly, the development of soft skills is equally important as the development of hard skills, in particular in a post-conflict situation where structures are not functioning and many staff are demoralised and lack self-confidence. The transfer of soft skills cannot simply be achieved by regular training activities. It requires a process of continuous coaching and, in many cases, a relationship of trust, solidarity and mutual respect. The presence of a volunteer within the organisation over a prolonged period of time, combined with the attributes described in section 4.3.1, many of which inherent to volunteering, means that volunteers are in a prime position to facilitate the transfer of soft skills.

New cadre: nurses and teachers

Apart from the training of *existing* cadre, three volunteers were involved in the training of new teachers and nine volunteers in the training of new nurses. These placement are long term investment in the training of new cadre to address the very significant shortage of qualified teachers and nurses in South Sudan. Table 12 shows the number of students reached through these placements:

Table 12: Number of teacher and nurse students reached with improved training

	Education	Health
Number of students reached in 2012	Female: 8 Male: 63 **Total: 71**	Female: 81 Male: 215 **Total: 296**
Number of students reached in 2013	Female: 40 Male: 43 **Total: 83**	Female: 127 Male: 275 **Total: 402**

As mentioned in 2.5 the sample did not include volunteer placements in teacher training colleges. This research therefore cannot comment on the changes affected at this level.

The focus of the volunteer placements with nurse training institutes was on the transfer of both theoretical and practical nursing skills. The volunteers worked as members of a team of tutors. Of these, many were from outside South Sudan due to the difficulty in recruiting South Sudanese nurse tutors. As a result, the focus of skills transfer was on the student nurses rather than their fellow tutors, although some exchange of teaching skills and methodologies among tutors themselves did happen.

Placement of the first volunteers in nurse training institutes highlighted the need to reinforce class-room-based training with practical training on the ward. To reinforce the practical skills of nurse trainees (as well as existing nurses!), VSO decided to create complementary volunteer placements in hospital wards. These placements focussed, amongst others, on hygiene, infection control, drug administration, nurse-patient relationships, etc. Through these placements, the skills taught in the classroom were reinforced when student nurses were doing their practical assignments in the hospital.

VSO's investment in the training of new nurses was supported by the placement of a volunteer with the Ministry of Health at national level who, amongst others, advised on the recruitment and selection of nurse students thereby improving the entry level of new students.

4.4.2   Changes at the level of organisations

As mentioned in section 3.1 the government structures in South Sudan were put in place following the proclamation of independence in 2011. While nominally the structures exist, in reality many of them are dysfunctional and lack the capacity to deliver basic services and programmes. In case of CSOs the picture is more mixed, ranging from very weak local CSOs to well-established NGOs that are well run and effective in pursuing their mission.

Bringing about institutional change in this context requires time and sustained effort. It raises the question to what extent the transfer of hard and soft skills between volunteers and their colleagues has translated into a gradual improvement in institutional effectiveness.

The information generated through the application of VSO's quality scales as well the *ladders of change* shows that, generally speaking, the process of institutional change has been slow, as expected. A very low starting point, frequent staff changes, absenteeism, resistance to change and lack of operational budget are among the reasons mentioned.

Change has been particularly slow among health partners at County level. Many volunteers working at County Health Department level, in particular those with a background in health administration, found it challenging to identify sufficient opportunities where they could add value. The focus of their work was largely on the development of basic management templates e.g. for drug administration and some basic analysis of health statistics, however the volume of work tended to be limited. More recently this was starting to change following the roll-out of the Health Pooled Fund, which created a new impetus for CHDs and the need for input from a public health and health administration perspective. Similarly, the roll-out of the Basic Services Fund was expected to create

> County Health Department: "The volunteer has provided on the job training in facility supervision, health facility data collection and management".

momentum at County level, which would have provided new opportunities for volunteers to provide technical input. In the absence of sufficient volume of work in health administration and public health, volunteers with a background in nursing found it easier to identify additional opportunities to add value, e.g. through engaging in the training of Community Health Volunteers, supervision of clinics, and networking with other NGOs.

Health volunteers at State and National level were able to make some progress in strengthening the management capacity of the Ministry of Health, although the progress was still very fragile and often dependent on a small number of strong leaders.

A more recent development was the improvement in collaboration and coordination between County, State and National level as a result of the roll-out of the Health Pooled Fund. Volunteers played a key role in facilitating these synergies.

> "Our County Education Office is now perceived as being ahead of other Counties".

Changes in institutional capacity among education partner has been more visible, in particular in the areas of human resource management, planning, school inspection, gender and networking. An important contributing factor to these changes is that the structures, in particular at County level, are more established than in health. There are clear business processes that volunteers can engage in, such as school inspection, teacher training, training of head-teachers in school administration, training of Parent Teacher Associations, etc. Furthermore, in 2013 the impetus behind the promotion of girls education was growing. Many volunteers, in particular those working with the County Education Office, engaged directly with a number of schools, which helped them develop a relationship of trust as well as a good understanding of the reality in the classroom. This experience was directly applicable in their work with the County Education Office.

At the level of CSO partner organisation, changes in institutional capacity were observed for many placements. Areas where significant progress was made included collaboration and networking, strategy development, communication, human resource management, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation. The key enabling factors identified included leadership; drive and commitment; a clear sense of purpose and direction; and working in generally smaller and more

flexible organisational structures where change is more easily absorbed. The changes effected at organisational level with input from volunteers, put CSOs in a better position to deliver services and programmes and engage in democratic processes.

> A CSO partner: ''[Our organisation] is very strong now; we are now more transparent and accountable for the grants we receive. [The volunteer] showed us how to carry out accounting of money we receive; our accounting system is good and this has built the confidence of [the donor] with our organisation. [The donor] has now signed a three-year MoU with us. Other NGOs have told us that we are now standing. In addition, there is improved trust of us by the community''.
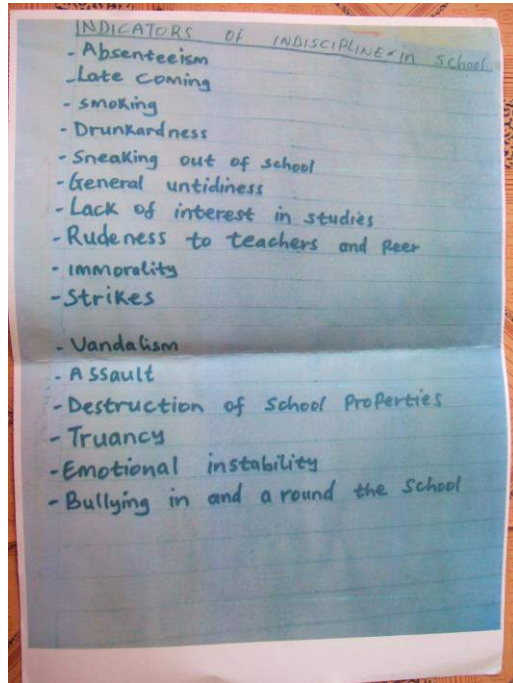
4.4.3   Changes in the quality of services

The vast majority of volunteers were not involved in the direct delivery of services. In most cases improvements in service delivery would be dependent on changes in institutional capacity. As discussed in the previous section, these types of changes take a long time to affect. The impact on the quality of services provided at this early stage of the programme is therefore likely to be limited. Nevertheless, there are some initial examples where improvement in service delivery was starting to become visible:

- Some volunteers working at County Education Office level were directly working with a selection of schools. There are concrete examples where some of these schools became better managed through an investment in training of head-teachers and PTAs, classroom practice improved and girls education became more prominent.
- The nurses trained through VSO-supported nurse training institutes were showing initial improvements in infection control and communication with patients and their families.
- A striking example is the impact of the work of a short-term volunteer at Juba Teaching Hospital who, untypically, found a ward that was characterised by extremely poor hygiene standards and a lack of care for patients and their relatives. Through her presence and her patient but persistent way of coaching, within a 9-months period the ward was turned into a clean, well-managed ward that set a striking example to other wards in the hospital. This experience informed VSO's decision to place more volunteers in hospitals to further support the training and coaching of both new and existing nursing cadre.

> Matron: "Initially we asked ourselves: What is she [the volunteer] doing? Now, the ward is organised, she is attending to patients. For them [the patients] she has done something". This has also had an impact on the nurses on the ward: "Nurses are now capable. They talk to patients, they know the problem of patients".

- Service provision by some of the VSO-supported CSOs became better organised, more relevant and focussed. A concrete example is the improved Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) services provided by one of the partner CSOs.

Volunteering for development in South Sudan

INDICATORS OF INDISCIPLINE IN School
- Absenteeism
- Late Coming
- Smoking
- Drunkardness
- Sneaking out of school
- General untidiness
- Lack of interest in studies
- Rudeness to teachers and peer
- Immorality
- Strikes

- Vandalism
- Assault
- Destruction of school properties
- Truancy
- Emotional instability
- Bullying in and around the School

Education in South Sudan: a mixed experience (photos by Debbie Buckley)

4.4.4   Policy development

While no specific research questions had been identified with regard to VSO's role in policy development, the role of volunteers in policy development in South Sudan needs to be explored as it was a key deliverable of VSO's programme in South Sudan. In line with VSO's global strategy *People First* (VSO 2011) volunteers at National and State level in particular have played an important role in policy development. Key examples include:

- VSO supported the development of a policy and supporting tools for school inspection by the Department of Quality Assurance and Standards. A short-term volunteer and his counterpart prepared an impressive package consisting of a policy for school inspection and supporting tools. The volunteer did a number of short term assignments spread out over a period of two years in order to ensure continuity

- VSO supported the development of policy on Girls Education in Western Equatoria State (WES), through the placement of a volunteer for a period of one year. The policy was converted into a draft bill that was about to be adopted at State level by the end of 2013. Following the departure of the volunteer in early 2013 the Ministry of Education (MOE) continued to pursue approval of the policy by the Assembly, which is a reflection of the ownership the MOE and politicians had taken.

- Through the placement of a short-term volunteer with the Department of Nursing for a period of nine months, VSO supported the development of a revised curriculum for nurse training. At the end of the volunteer's placement a draft curriculum was in place. One of the challenges was that no direct counterpart was in place to work with the volunteer, which affected the continuity of this work.

- Another short-term volunteer supported the Ministry of Health to develop a package of operational policies and supporting guidelines for use at County Health Department level. The package aimed to define the roles and responsibilities of staff at CHD level, and provide guidance for supervision of health facilities by CHDs, the analysis of health statistics and community consultation. By the end of 2013 the draft package was ready to be tested at field level.

Given the nature of policy development, ensuring continuity of policy development through the placements of volunteers has been challenging. While the development of the substance of policies lends itself for short-term placement of volunteers, supporting the political process required for the adoption and implementation of policies is likely to require support over a prolonged period of time. This normally stretches beyond the period covered by short-term placements, and sometimes even long-term placements. Strategies to facilitate continuity include collaboration with a South Sudanese counterpart, placement of short-term volunteers alongside volunteers on a two-year assignment, the provision of support to the political process by VSO Programme Managers and close collaboration with other partner organisations that have a clear stake in the policy process such as donor agencies as well as other INGOs. By the end of 2013 VSO was exploring the different strategic opportunities to ensure continuity of the policy processes in which it was involved.

In addition to the aforementioned examples of policy development at National and State level, many volunteers were involved in the development of internal policies to improve the management and accountability of their host agency. The policies developed covered critical areas such as human resource management, financial management, communication, etc.

4.5   Volunteering for development: impact

Research questions identified by VSO:

- What are the changes in people's lives as a results of improved service provision?
- What factors influence these changes?

As mentioned in section 2.6, due to the early suspension of VSO's programme, the opportunity to gather information that reflects changes at community level was limited. By December 2013 only two sentinel communities had been selected and paid an initial visit. Both sentinel communities were exposed to volunteers working in VSO's governance programme.

Table 13: Selection of sentinel communities

Placement	Programme	Status
St. Monica's Women's Development Group, Pajok	Governance	First community visit during the visit in October 2013.
Women's Development Group, Way	Governance	First community visit during the visit in October 2013.

In both sentinel communities, community members recognised the improvements in programme delivery by the CSOs since the arrival of the volunteers. In both cases this had resulted in improvement of community organisation, increased agricultural production as well as increased awareness on gender-related issues, such as gender-based violence and early marriage. In both communities, community members mentioned the integration of the volunteer and the relationship of trust as key contributing factors to these changes.

While these *initial* findings are encouraging, it should be emphasized that they reflect change achieved through VSO's governance programme only, on a relatively small scale and at a very local level. The realisation of similar changes at scale, and through more systemic changes in the provision of health and education services, is likely to require significantly more time. At this point, no major conclusions can therefore be drawn with regard to changes at community level as a result of VSO's overall programme.

4.6   VSO's value added

Research questions identified by VSO:

≡   What would have happened without VSO's support?

≡   How does VSO's contribution compare to the contribution by other organisations?

≡   How does VSO contribute to the implementation of programmes by other INGOs?

Given 1) the diverse and extensive nature of VSO's programme, 2) the very specific characteristics of each partner organisation, and 3) the nature and range of changes effected by VSO's programme, it would have been impossible to design a 'counterfactual' to assess what would have happened without VSO's support. However, as highlighted in previous sections, interviews across the sample of 42 placements show a *consistent* pattern in the types of hard *and* soft development outcomes generated through the placement of volunteers.

To assess what would have happened without VSO's support, seven[16] out of the sample of 42 partner organisations were asked what would have happened if they had not had the support of the volunteer. All seven partner organisations highlighted the fact that they would not have been as effective in delivering their mandate. They all highlighted the positive effect of the placement of a volunteer over a prolonged period of time on the capacity development at both staff and institutional level, ranging from strategic planning, human resource management, financial management, IT skills, etcetera to increased motivation and sense of direction.

As mentioned before, other partner agencies recognise the added value of having volunteers working within the South Sudanese system. It has helped them build a better relationship with the partner organisations and deliver their programmes more effectively due to better coordination with and understanding of the South Sudanese partner organisations.

One County Health Department representative stated that the Health Pooled Fund would not have materialised in their County without the guidance and support of the volunteer.

---

[16] Partner organisations were only given the '*what-if*' scenarios towards the end of the volunteer placements. Due to the early suspension of VSO's programme in South Sudan, a response was obtained from only seven out of 42 partner organisations.

5 Sustainability

Sustainable development in a fragile state that has experienced decades of civil war and where basic services are being built up from scratch, requires a long term view. As the current conflict demonstrates, development in South Sudan is likely to suffer set-backs. It will require commitment, investment and solidarity over a prolonged period of time before a reasonable level of human, social, political and economic development will be reached. The response required by the international community will be a combination of emergency response and investment in long term development. The balance between these two types of investment is likely to fluctuate, with significant variations between regions. It requires a high level of flexibility where development programmes can be scaled back when conflict flares up and resumed when relative stability returns.

As explored in section 4, through its education, health and governance programme VSO South Sudan has generated an impressive mix of hard and soft development outcomes. Analysis of the types of outcomes generated shows that it includes key building blocks of sustainable programme development.

- As highlighted in 4.4.1, the most immediate effect of the placement of volunteers has been on the exchange of knowledge, skills and experience between volunteers and their counterparts. It includes the transfer of both hard and soft skills. During the first two years of VSO's presence in South Sudan, developing a cadre of skilled professionals across the education and health sector, as well as at the level of South Sudanese CSOs, has been VSO's most important contribution to long term development by far. Given the extreme lack of skilled professionals as a result of decades of civil was, it addresses both short and long term needs across the sectors to which VSO contributes. Not only are results generated at this level an essential pillar for long term development in South Sudan, these types of outcomes are likely to be relatively shock-proof. Even with the current conflict and the subsequent suspension of VSO's programme, the benefits of this investment will continue to be relevant.
- To what extent the progress achieved at institutional level will be maintained, remains to be seen. While some of the changes are firmly embedded in the organisational structures, government institutions in particular are likely to undergo change and suffer significant set-backs, in particular in the geographical areas worse affected by the current political crisis. This will be further aggravated by discontinuity of funding by international donors in response to the current conflict. In contrast, the progress made at the level of partner CSOs is likely to be less affected. They will continue to play an important, if not bigger role, in community organisation, service provision and democratic processes.
- At this stage the future of some of the policies developed with input from VSO, as described in 4.4.4, is not clear. Whether they will be adopted and implemented will be largely dependent on the actions of South Sudanese counterparts and the appetite among some international agencies (e.g. donors, UN, etc) to take them forward.

The soft development outcomes described in chapter 4, such as ownership, increased motivation and sense of direction, are likely to have a significant impact on the continuity and sustainability of hard development outcomes generated. Furthermore, the fact that the hard and soft changes described in chapter 4 have been achieved through the placement of volunteers, rather than through a significant financial investment, means that no relationship of financial dependence has been created. While the suspension of VSO's programme is far from ideal, some of the changes are likely to be sustained, even in the absence of volunteers.

6   Value for money

As described in section 4, VSO's programme in education, health and governance has been effective in bringing about change at outcome level. The nature and the quality of the inputs provided by VSO, the delivery of support at the right level, and the consequent combination of hard and soft development outcomes generated, make VSO's approach to volunteering for development particularly relevant and effective in the fragile context of South Sudan. It supports South Sudanese organisations in taking ownership of and furthering the long term development agenda. It compares favourably with the provision of other types of technical assistance, such as ad-hoc training and consultancies.

With the placement of 81 volunteers over a two-year period, at a cost of £66 per volunteer per day[17] (£24,000 per volunteer per year), VSO's approach therefore provides remarkably high value for money and at a significant scale. A technical adviser with similar experience and background to the volunteers, recruited by an international organisation would cost on average at least £50,000 to £60,000 annually (DFID 2014). It also compares favourably with the costs of UN volunteers, which in 2010 was estimated between US$45k and US$91k per annum (United Nations Volunteers 2010).

VSO's partner organisations also confirm the value for money provided by VSO. Thirteen partner organisations out of the sample of 42 were given the hypothetical choice between a volunteer for a year or US$35k. Twelve of the 13 partner organisations responded that they would prefer a volunteer, as it provides better value for money. The following quotes illustrate the reasons behind the preference for a volunteer:

- "The $35K can be used to hire a consultant who will provide one-off support that is not consistent – the volunteer placement is therefore better".
- "Having a Volunteer is better than US$35k; many INGOs have provided money, cars and motorbikes sometimes without operational support budget. A volunteer provides knowledge and experience and this lasts longer than cash and materials".
- "The presence of the volunteer has profiled [the organisation] among donors and in the last one year, the organisation has received more than $35k. Over and above this, staff capacity has been built and the volunteer's support has also enabled [us] to support the community in the years to come".
- "We have been linked with donors and development partners by the volunteer – he is worth more than the money".
- "The value of developing an organisation is higher than the value of money to implement an activity".
- "We now have a process of solving problems. In the future we won't need consultants to do this for us".
- "The biggest challenge we face is getting trainers. That is what we need". "What would we do with US$35k? It's a lot of money but a volunteer trainer is more useful for us".

---

[17] Provisional figure provided by VSO Headquarters (November 2013). The figure includes the volunteer related costs in country and overheads including recruitment costs, insurance and a proportion of Country Office staff costs to reflect the support provided to volunteers. The figure is calculated based on the total average costs per volunteer divided by 365 days. The figure is still undergoing further review and may be refined at a later stage.

7 Conclusions

When VSO started its programme in 2012, the context of South Sudan was referred to as a 'post-conflict' situation. Developments since December 2013 have highlighted the fact that the conflict situation is far from over. Even when the situation stabilises, conflicts are likely to occasionally flare up in the foreseeable future. This results in a highly unpredictable situation that is typical for fragile states.

This research initiative looked at the value of volunteering in the fragile context of South Sudan by following a cohort of 42 volunteers during the period 2012-2013. The information generated during this two-year period provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of VSO's programme in South Sudan.

Despite the very challenging political and operational environment of South Sudan, VSO succeeded in establishing a strong programme. The programme was mainly delivered through the placement of 81 international volunteers with partner organisations at Community, County, State and National level.

The research findings consistently show that volunteers were effective in strengthening the capacities of both their immediate counterparts as well as the partner organisations. They generated a mix of hard and soft development outcomes. While many of the hard development outcomes (e.g. professional skills, policy development, management, etc) are similar to those pursued by other development agencies, the soft outcomes (e.g. values, motivation, energy, ownership, sense of direction, etc) are more specific to VSO's approach to volunteering for development. The delivery of a combination of hard and soft development outcomes over a prolonged period of time puts VSO in a very strong position to contribute to the long term development agenda in the fragile context of South Sudan.

This research project has identified the following key factors that makes VSO's approach to V4D an effective way of contributing to long-term development in South Sudan:

- **Strong, systemic programme design:** From the start, the design of VSO's programme was very strong and strategic. By investing in capacity building at Community, County, State and National level at the same time, VSO put itself in a position to make a significant contribution to systemic change. It highlights the importance of taking a systemic programme-approach from the start, rather than a focus on a portfolio of individual volunteer placements. The benefits and effectiveness of this multi-level approach was starting to become visible, in particular during the course of 2013.
- **Investing in partner-led development:** By placing volunteers *within* South Sudanese organisations, it strengthens local organisations to further develop and take ownership of the long-term development agenda. This approach reflects the spirit of the SDGs post 2015 (United Nations 2013), the Istanbul Development Effectiveness Principles (Open Forum 2010), and the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (High level forum on aid effectiveness 2011).
- **Engaging in large, donor-funded initiatives:** Volunteer engagement in large, donor-funded initiatives such as DFID's Girls Education programme and the Health Pooled Fund, has given volunteers a structure to focus their support to government institutions. It provided an opportunity to create momentum at the level of, often ineffective, government institutions. This became particularly relevant when many government institutions ground to a hold as a result of the austerity budget. At the same time, the in-depth understanding of volunteers of the local context, provided donor agencies with a better insight of the reality on the ground. Further

engagement in large donor initiative will therefore enhance the effectiveness of both volunteer placements and large scale donor initiatives.

- **High quality inputs:** VSO succeeded in mobilising 81 international volunteers, each with a wealth of professional experience, as reflected in the average age of volunteers.
- **Attributes associated with volunteering:** The attributes of volunteers as described in 4.3.1, many of which are inherent to VSO's approach to V4D, enable volunteers to effect change at the level of their counterparts and partner organisations. By working and living at the same level as their counterparts and coaching over a prolonged period of time, volunteers are able to develop a relationship of trust, which in turn allows them to generate development outcomes that are less likely to be achieved through other forms of technical assistance.
- **Duration of engagement:** The duration of placements is an important factor that enables volunteers to facilitate change at the level of their counterparts and partner organisations. While shortening the duration of many assignments to one year was essential to attract volunteers in sufficient numbers, both volunteers and their partner organisations recognise the value of having volunteers for a two-year period.
- **Pitching volunteer input at the right level:** Since volunteers work within South Sudanese organisations, they are able to pitch their input and the pace of development at a level that is appropriate for each partner organisation. This is particularly critical in an unpredictable context where organisations and basic services are being built up from scratch and where much of the inputs of the development sector are pitched at too high a level.
- **Combining of hard and soft development outcomes:** The placement of volunteers *within* South Sudanese organisation over a prolonged period of time facilitates the realisation of both hard and soft development outcomes. This combination of outcomes enables partner organisations to further develop and take ownership of the long-term development agenda. It is an essential part of VSO's sustainability proposition.

Jointly, these factors have contributed to a highly effective programme that represents high value for money. If and when VSO's programme in South Sudan is resumed, or VSO decides to open programmes in other fragile states, the following opportunities to further increase the effectiveness of VSO's approach should be considered:

- **Increasing the volunteer-staff ratio:** Due to the logistical challenges in South Sudan, much staff time at Country Office level was taken up by operational management, with little time for programme and strategic management. An increase in the volunteer-staff ratio would enable VSO to capitalise more effectively on the results generated by volunteers by facilitating synergies and learning across partner organisations and sectors, supporting policy development processes, etc.
- **Clustering of volunteers:** Rather than having volunteers widely spread across five States from the start of the programme, clustering volunteers in a limited number of States would facilitate learning, collaboration and synergies across placements and sectors.
- **Pairing of short and long term volunteers:** Short-term volunteers have played an important role in the development of a number of national level policies. However, continuity of the political process of adoption and implementation of new policies has been challenging. To address this challenge, the possibility of short-term volunteers working alongside long-term volunteers who engage in the longer term political process needs to be explored.
- **Volunteers providing support to more than one organisation:** To optimise the use of the volunteers' presence and expertise, the possibility of volunteers supporting more than one partner organisation could be explored. This is particularly relevant for CSO- and County-level placements where the volume of work is not always sufficient to occupy a volunteer full-time.

- **Locating Programme Managers at State level:** Rather than locating all Programme Managers in the Country Office in the capital, the possibility of having a Programme Manager at State level could be considered. By locating Programme Managers at this level, they would be in a better position to provide support to a cluster of volunteers across different sectors and facilitate synergies and learning across partner agencies. It would enable VSO to build strong, sustainable relationships with partner organisations and facilitate continuity during the process of replacing volunteers.

- **Increased focus on learning and programme management:** To optimise the use of learning opportunities that exist, going forward it is important that more time is allocated to programme management at a more strategic level. An increased volunteer-staff ratio, combined with locating Programme Managers at State level, would facilitate this.

With the establishment of a programme in South Sudan, VSO took a bold decision to test its approach to V4D in a fragile state. This research has shown that the approach is appropriate and can be effective in such challenging context.

It also highlights that working in such environment requires a long-term perspective. Given the nature of fragile states, it is inevitable that set-backs will be encountered. It requires a high level of flexibility, both from VSO *and* its funding agencies, so that programmes can be adapted, scaled back and resumed, while having adequate (and often costly) security provisions in place. It requires long-term commitment and solidarity, regardless of how the situation evolves.

While VSO's decision to suspend its programme is entirely understandable, it is hoped that VSO, once the situation in South Sudan stabilises again, will be able to resume its programme and continue to build on the strong foundations laid in the first two years.

Endnotes

Devereux, P. and K. Guse (2012). MDGs, Sustainable Development Goals and the Post 2015 agenda: opportunities for consolidating the recognition of volunteerism. A discussion paper for IVCO 2012. Forum discussion papers, Forum, UNV.

DFID (2011). South Sudan Operational Plan 2011-2015. UK, DFID.

DFID (2014). Annual Review of VSO South Sudan. South Sudan, DFID.

Green, J. and N. Thorogood (2009). Qualitative methods for health research. London, Sage.

High level forum on aid effectiveness (2011). Retrieved 31 May 2014, 2014, from http://www.newdeal4peace.org/about-the-new-deal/.

Hutton, L. (2014). South Sudan: from fragility at Independence to a crisis of sourvereignty, CRU.

IGAD (2014). Symposium to initiate inclusive IGAD-led Peace Talks for South Sudan to convene in Addis Ababa. Addis Ababa, IGAD.

Lough, B. J. and M. Lenore (2013). Forum Discussion Paper 2013: Measuring and conveying the added value of international voluntering. USA, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

OECD (2005). "Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action." Retrieved 2 December, 2013, from http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/parisdeclarationandaccraagendaforaction.htm.

Open Forum (2010). "Istanbul CSO development effectiveness principles." Retrieved 23 July 2013, from http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_istanbul_cso_development_effectiveness_principles_footnote_december_2010-2.pdf.

Stern, E. t. L., et al. (2012). Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations. DFID working paper 38. UK, DFID.

United Nations (2013). A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development. New York.

United Nations Volunteers (2010). Hosting a UN Volunteer. An orientation guide. Bonn, UNV.

United Nations Volunteers (2011). Assessing the contribution of volunteering to develoment. A participatory methodology. Bonn, UNDP.

VSO (2011). People First - VSO Strategy. London, VSO.