Testimony

Inclusion and Effectiveness in International Volunteering and Service

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Inclusion and Effectiveness in International Volunteering and Service

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I am honored to present on inclusion and effectiveness in international volunteering and service. The statement I deliver today is on behalf of my colleagues Professor Margaret Sherraden of the University of Missouri-St. Louis and Benjamin Lough at the Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis. Drawing on research about international service conducted in the United States and overseas, this statement is an overview of what is known about the status and impacts of international volunteering and service.[1]

Potential of International Volunteering and Service

International volunteering is a form of civic service. We define civic service as "an organized period of engagement and contribution to society sponsored by public or private organizations, and recognized and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant" (M. Sherraden, 2001). Civic service aims for impacts on host communities and their residents as well as for the volunteers themselves (IVR, 2004; M. S. Sherraden & Benítez, 2003). National service and international service are two prominent forms worldwide (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003).

National service is performed by citizens within their national borders. From the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s to AmeriCorps today, national service meets pressing community needs while increasing the skills and capacities of those who serve (Jastrzab et al., 2006; M. Sherraden, 1979).

International service is performed *across* national borders. It is increasing in scope and importance around the world (Clark, 2003; Hills & Mahmud, 2007; Kaldor, 2003; McBride & Sherraden, 2007). International service has roots in nineteenth century missionary work and early twentieth century international peace and post-war reconstruction efforts (Rosenstock-Huessy, 1978). As reflected in William James' vision of service for peaceful purposes at the beginning of the twentieth century, international volunteering and service has renewed purpose at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Davis Smith, Ellis, & Brewis, 2005; Eberly & Sherraden, 1990; McBride, Benítez, & Danso, 2003).

In an era of increasing globalization, international volunteering and service (hereafter referred to as "IVS") may have significant potential to contribute to international peace, cooperation, and development (Caprara, Bridgeland, & Wofford, 2007). The challenge in the first decades of the twenty-first century is to create avenues

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[1] We incorporate a range of evidence, including quantitative and qualitative studies. We also include national service research when applicable, because the time-limited, intensive nature of the service experience is similar in both national and international service and the process of program development and implementation has some corollaries.

for participation in international service and to ensure that it provides meaningful and long-lasting value to both sending and hosting communities.

IVS includes unilateral service (volunteers from one country serve in another country), multilateral (volunteers serve in each others' countries), as well as more complex arrangements (McBride & Daftary, 2005; M. S. Sherraden, Stringham, Sow, & McBride, 2006). IVS can be performed by individuals or in groups, including multinational groups. The duration of service may be weeks or years. It takes place under the auspices of public, nonprofit, or corporate organizations (McBride, Benítez, & Danso, 2003). Under the right circumstances, IVS can increase understanding and cooperation across borders, contribute to development and well-being, and result in other positive impacts (Sherraden et al., 2006).

Governments around the globe have been called to dedicate resources to support volunteering (Anheier & Salamon, 1999). Delegates to the World Summit on Sustainable Development have considered that, in addition to environmental protection, economic growth, and social development, voluntary action could be key to sustainable development (UNV, 2002b). The President of the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC), which represents nearly 100 million volunteers across the globe, has stated that "volunteers are our greatest strength" (UNV, 2002a).

Extent of International Volunteering and Service

In a 2003 assessment of civic service worldwide, we found that IVS programs were the most prevalent service form (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). Among 210 civic service programs, 124 were international service. The majority of programs were based in North America and Western Europe, and sent volunteers to countries of the Global South. Of the 124 international programs, 38 were sponsored by organizations in the United States. Except for the Peace Corps, all of the US-based programs were operated by nonprofit organizations. Similarly, a 2005 survey of 52 US-based international volunteer sending programs found that the majority of programs were operated by nonprofit organizations, including faith-based and university programs (Rieffel & Zalud, 2006). A growing number of corporations also sponsor international volunteering (Hills & Mahmud, 2007).

Depending on the methods used, the estimated number of individuals volunteering internationally varies. Nationally-representative surveys have only begun to ask about international volunteering. In 2004, the Bureau of Labor Statistics began tracking international volunteers in the Current Population Survey (CPS) annual September volunteer supplement. Though too early to call it a trend, CPS data indicate that the number of American volunteers serving overseas increased between 2004 and 2005 (Lough, 2006).

Additional evidence suggests that interest in IVS is on the rise. Natural disasters and other global crises such as the tsunami in Asia, the earthquake in Pakistan, and Hurricanes Katrina, Wilma, and Rita, have been associated with an increase in American

philanthropy and volunteer service, reported to be at its highest levels over the past six years (Barnett, 2006; Randel & Baker, 2005). In a recent State of the Union address, President Bush asserted the importance of IVS, in particular, toward "ensuring a future of peace, hope, and promise for all people" (Peace Corps, 2005a: 1).

Program level data also underscore the growing interest in IVS. The International Volunteer Program Association (IVPA), a consortium of 33 IVS programs in the United States, has seen a steady increase in the number of applications its member programs receive. On another front, although the number of Peace Corps volunteers has remained fairly stagnant over the past 30 years, applications increased by 10 percent following the events of 9/11 (Peace Corps, 2005a). By 2006, 7,749 Peace Corps volunteers were serving in 73 countries overseas, an increase of more than 1,000 volunteers since 2002 (Peace Corps, 2007a).

Profile of International Volunteers

Based on findings from the 2005 Current Population Survey, US-volunteers serving overseas tend to be male, younger, White, married with no dependents, college educated, and employed full-time with higher incomes (Lough & McBride, forthcoming).

Although the percentage of males and females is relatively equal in the United States, men have historically volunteered abroad more than women (S. Cohn, Wood, & Haag, 1981; S. F. Cohn & Wood, 1985; Williams, 1991). According to CPS data, men are 40 percent more likely than women to volunteer internationally (Lough & McBride, forthcoming).

Likewise, although young people under age 24 are not the largest age group in the United States, they are the group most likely to volunteer internationally. While international service among youth declined slightly between 2004 and 2005, adults over age 65 substantially increased their international volunteerism over the two years (Lough, 2006). This may be a trend to watch as the number of older adults increases (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; McBride, 2007).

Whites are nearly twice as likely to volunteer internationally as people of color (Lough & McBride, forthcoming). This is reflected in the demographic characteristics of Peace Corps members: the number of African-Americans, Latinos, and Asian-Americans volunteering is considerably less than their prevalence in the US population with rates of 3, 4, and 5 percent respectively (Peace Corps, 2007b).

Higher education is one of the strongest predictors of international volunteering (Lough & McBride, forthcoming). Three out of four international volunteers have attended at least some college, and more than half have a bachelor's degree or higher. Although a college degree is not a requirement for most programs, having a degree may enhance the possibility of acceptance into these programs (Peace Corps, 2007b).

Financial resources also appear to facilitate service overseas. Nearly one in four volunteers who serves abroad lives in a household earning $100,000 or more, and six in ten volunteers live in households earning more than $50,000 per year (Lough, 2006). Most volunteers are employed, and nearly half of all international volunteers are employed full-time.

Volunteer Activities

Volunteers abroad engage in a wide range of activities and programs (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). IVS programs aim to build connections across national borders, develop intercultural sensitivity and tolerance, increase global consciousness, encourage international solidarity, and promote international peace and understanding (Randel et al., 2005). Others focus on sharing expertise with communities where skill-based assistance is needed. In the global assessment of civic service mentioned previously, 85 percent of international service activities included some form of educational services, compared to about 70 percent of national volunteer programs (McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003). Other activities included human and social services (80 percent), community development (75 percent), and environmental protection (73 percent) McBride, Benítez, & Sherraden, 2003).

Additional activities engaged in by international volunteers include health and nutrition projects, disaster relief and recovery efforts, economic development, historical and cultural preservation, and cross-cultural understanding and peace building projects. Some IVS projects address broad community needs, while others focus on specific groups, such as children or the elderly, HIV patients or people living with disabilities, indigenous or minority communities, or the rural poor.

Case studies suggest that IVS programs are particularly useful in the areas of teaching English or other languages and literacy (Chelikani & Khan, 1990), and providing health care (Said, 2007a). There are also civic roles for volunteers in mediating local conflicts (Spence, 2006; UNDP, 2003; Werna & Schneider, 2006), promoting peace-keeping efforts (Capeling-Alakija, 2001), and overseeing elections (Said, 2007b).

International volunteering is increasingly adopting a development-centered approach focusing directly on capacity-building within communities (Greenwood, Vo, & My, 2005; Leigh, 2005; Rockliffe, 2005). Volunteers engage local residents in development projects, improve organizational relations within the community, and provide forums for sharing viewpoints on issues of mutual concern (M. S. Sherraden, 2007; M. S. Sherraden & Benítez, 2003). Sponsoring organizations describe the role that volunteers have as "external catalyzing agents…in initiating and consolidating the development process of communities, or accelerating what otherwise would have taken much longer to evolve" (Werna & Schneider, 2006).

Volunteer Impacts

Although few rigorous studies assess the impact of IVS on beneficiaries and host communities, case studies and cross-sectional research indicate that international volunteering and service has potential positive impacts on volunteers, beneficiaries, and host communities, as well as on sending and hosting organizations. Below we summarize the research findings, which are, at this time, more suggestive than definitive.

The impacts of IVS on the volunteers themselves have received the most attention from researchers. Studies assess changes in volunteer perspectives and skills. Noteworthy outcomes are that volunteers are living outside of their country and culture for the first time, possibly learning another language and work skills, interacting with those who are different in many ways from themselves, and usually engaging in demanding work. For these reasons perhaps, the international service experience has been referred to as a "turning point" in the life of volunteers (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2007; Starr, 1994).

A few of the multiple benefits of IVS include cultural awareness and an emerging global consciousness (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2007; Hammer, 2005; Jones, 2005; Purvis, 1993; M. S. Sherraden, 2001, 2007; Sternberger, Ford, & Hale, 2005; Williams, 1991); development of leadership skills and organizational abilities (Grusky, 2000; Jones, 2005); language, communication and problem-solving skills; and the ability to work effectively with different cultures (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2007; Hammer, 2005; M. S. Sherraden & Benítez, 2003). Service overseas may be particularly useful in developing critical thinking skills "due to the ways in which culture, language, religion, and beliefs are under constant challenge in foreign settings" (Kraft, 2002: 308).

IVS also has positive effects on employability. A survey of 516 managers and 100 returned volunteers found that 94 percent of employers agree that long-term IVS broadens skills and experiences, 48 percent believe it increases employability, and 67 percent believe that returned volunteers bring unique skills and experiences to their organization such as increased confidence, breadth of experience, ability to manage diversity, and greater flexibility (Cook & Jackson, 2006). The same study reports that 80 percent of volunteers believe they gained skills through long-term service overseas that they would not have acquired if they had not gone abroad. These benefits are reported to be a major motivation for volunteering abroad (Grusky, 2000; Jones, 2005). Additional studies have confirmed the impact of service on skill development and employability, particularly for disadvantaged youth (EVS, 1999; IVR, 2002, 2006; Spring, Dietz, & Grimm, 2007).

Much like national service, IVS appears to create a "virtuous circle" of service and civic engagement. Volunteers participating in any type of intensive civic service are more likely to participate in other service experiences both at home and abroad (IVR, 2002; Jastrzab et al., 2006; Manitsas, 2000; Rockliffe, 2005). In a study of 118 young international volunteers, 69 percent reported previous volunteer experience, compared to only 37 percent of non-volunteer young adults in the same population (Rehberg, 2005).

These effects may be particularly strong for those volunteers from disadvantaged or low-income backgrounds (Spring et al., 2007).

Not only are volunteers more engaged in their home communities upon returning (EVS, 1999), but they also report having a more global perspective on local issues (Purvis, 1993). Through their work in foreign settings, these volunteers also may gain a greater understanding of the interdependence of social, economic, and political institutions globally (McBride, Sherraden, Benítez, & Johnson, 2004). They report being more informed about minority group issues and immigrant populations and having greater motivation to enter fields focused on social and economic development as a career (Fantini & Tirmizi, 2007; Grusky, 2000; Law, 1994; M. S. Sherraden, 2007).

The effects on returned volunteers may also be evident in volunteers' home communities. According to research from Voluntary Service Overseas, a large IVS program based in the United Kingdom, former volunteers promote cultural understanding by dispelling myths about foreigners, sparking dialogue about disadvantaged populations, explaining the importance of local and global interdependence, and encouraging global action. Returned volunteers have accomplished this by linking their home communities with international schools and communities; beginning community-action days to raise awareness of global issues such as AIDS, fair trade, and world poverty; setting up photo exhibitions; and organizing their communities around local issues (VSO, 2006).

Although there is less attention in the research to community impacts, case studies suggest that IVS also makes a contribution to the communities they serve by promoting public education and health, enhancing community relations and social capital, and encouraging economic development (Greenwood et al., 2005; IVR, 2002; Lopes & Theisohn, 2003; Mayer, 2003; Peace Corps, 2007a; Pratt, 2002; Raad, 2007; Salomon, Anheier, List, Toepler, & Sokolowski, 1999; UNV, 2004). A short survey of experts representing corporate volunteer programs indicates that nearly half of the benefits derived from international corporate service are perceived to have direct social or community impacts (Hills & Mahmud, 2007). Likewise, 40 percent of volunteers in another study agreed that long-term service is useful as a tool for community development (Cook & Jackson, 2006).

Effective International Volunteering and Service

The degree to which international volunteering and service achieves positive outcomes is related to how the service program is structured. In our review of IVS research, we identify three approaches that promote effectiveness, including cross-national and cross-cultural partnerships; volunteer selection and management; and inclusion of all potential volunteer groups.

Cross-national and Cross-cultural Partnerships

IVS is by its nature a multilateral and cross-cultural endeavor among the participating volunteers, communities, organizations, and nations. Research suggests that

active collaboration on the part of each may lead to more effective service programs and more positive outcomes for volunteers and their hosts (EVS, 1996; Keesbury, 2003; M. S. Sherraden, 2007; Spence, 2006; UNDP, 2003). A study by the US Agency for International Development indicates that when international service programs integrate host organizations and communities into the design and delivery process they are more successful at achieving goals for all involved (Keesbury, 2003). Although sending and hosting organizations typically share placement costs, host organizations often invest considerable resources in facilitating volunteer placements by matching volunteer interests and community needs, volunteer training and orientation, and on-site monitoring (Keesbury, 2003; Smith, 2004). A sending country bias may result in volunteers who seek personal benefit over service, and a host country bias may lead to unfulfilling experiences among volunteers. Therefore, it is important that both host and sending organizations are included in planning and delivery. Involving host communities in the process also increases ownership of the work and empowers residents to invest in local projects (M. S. Sherraden, 2007).

Working closely with the host community can also build on local skills, ensuring that service delivery is adapted to local circumstances, and minimizing dependence on sending organizations (Devereux, 2006; Morgan, 2002; Pratt, 2002). Mutual collaboration also plays a significant role in creating trust. When organizations and residents in host communities perceive volunteer motives as altruistic and aligned with the goals of the host communities, trust is established that helps communities participate more fully in the development process (Keesbury, 2003; Spence, 2006; UNDP, 2003).

Involving the host organization is also a necessary step in assessing community needs. According to the United Nations Development Program (2003), creating a mix of volunteer and community contributions maximizes the impact of international volunteers. "Demand driven" placements are most effective when volunteers do not replace activities that could otherwise be accomplished by local citizens (Keesbury, 2003). Where host community needs are not taken into consideration, volunteers serving overseas may supplant existing or potential jobs in host communities (EVS, 1996).

Determining the role of the volunteer and the length of placement that will best serve the needs of the community should also be done in partnership. Some research suggests that length of volunteer placement may be best matched to certain types of projects and community goals. Although shorter and longer types of placements can both increase cross-cultural understanding, achieving development impacts for the host communities may be more likely when programs are invested in the community for the long-term (Devereux, 2006; Gilfillan, forthcoming; Jones, 2005). Notably, short-term service programs may also have a long-term impact when projects are sustained in host communities over long periods.

One advantage of longer-term placements is that volunteers have a greater chance to integrate into the communities where they are located, thereby creating trust and networks and increasing mutual understanding (Devereux, 2006; Werna & Schneider, 2006). This approach has great potential to mediate conflict, increase accountability, and

provide information to otherwise disconnected communities and administrations (Keesbury, 2003; Spence, 2006; UNDP, 2003).

Volunteer Selection and Management

Volunteer selection and management affect program success. This includes the entire process, from recruitment and selection to training, placement, and follow-up. From the beginning, it is important to match the volunteer's background, motivations, and skills to the volunteer role. Rigorous screening helps ensure that volunteers are safely prepared for the work, have a good understanding of the commitment, and are positively received by the host community (Grossman & Furano, 1999). Careful screening may also influence length of service and personal satisfaction with a volunteer project (Cnaan & Cascio, 1999).

Orientation and training are crucial, whether it be orientation to the work and culture or language training (Frey, Ribustine, & Stringham, 1994). Orientation may also help educate volunteers about differences in cultural practices and strategies for action. Knowledge about the host country, its history, and its geopolitical relationships may help volunteers adapt successfully to their service placements (Engel, 2006). As a result, they may be more productive and gain more from the experience.

Although language ability is not a prerequisite for many programs, the ability to communicate effectively builds relationships with local residents. (Keesbury, 2003; Law, 1994; Lutyens, 1997). Although translators may be available, a basic understanding of the local language and a willingness to learn may be important factors in successful volunteer experiences (Keesbury, 2003). Programs should weigh the benefits and costs of language training prior to and concurrent with service.

A volunteer's reentry into her or his home country and "pre-service" life should be considered an important aspect of the international service experience. As a result of cross-cultural immersion, volunteers gain knowledge of the world and frequently change their perspectives. They may find their new perspectives difficult to articulate and apply to the next phase of their life. Volunteers report that a network of continued support is a component of a successful IVS experience (Law, 1994; Rolles, 1999). This support can range from service alumni groups sponsored by the sending organization to formal opportunities to reflect on and share their experiences. Follow-up training may help to capitalize on volunteers' newly acquired skills and integrate their foreign experiences with roles in their local communities. This is particularly important when the length of service is long-term and reentry may be more difficult (Williams, 1991).

Inclusion of All Groups

The potential benefits of IVS to the volunteer in terms of personal growth, development, and career potential suggest the importance of making certain that everyone who wishes to engage in IVS has the opportunity. Unfortunately, as the profile of Americans serving abroad suggests, IVS fails to reach many. Economic status, race,

ethnicity, age, and disability may represent significant barriers to service overseas (IVPA, 2006; IVR, 2006; Sygall & Lewis, 2006). A survey of 98 organizations and 203 volunteers identified a number of barriers to IVS in that persons with disabilities were under-represented, and volunteer opportunities were prohibitively expensive for those with low-income (IVR, 2006). Inclusion of all sectors of society in IVS requires support, outreach, and flexibility (McBride, 2007).

Economic support for volunteers is a crucial factor in expanding access to IVS. Although some service programs may be cost-effective (Jastrzab et al., 2006; Perry & Thomson, 2007), they are not free. Along with planning and delivery, both the sending and host organizations must screen, train, and follow-up with volunteers to ensure that they have successful experiences overseas, and that the local communities receive the services and outcomes they seek. As such, most IVS programs require volunteers to pay for some part of the experience. There are significant opportunity costs involved in volunteering, especially for low-income volunteers. Financial support is a key strategy to promote inclusion. The stipends, which are a main feature of the Global Service Fellowships, will expand the opportunity of serving internationally to more Americans.

In addition to defraying the costs of IVS, outreach strategies can help change the profile of Americans who volunteer internationally. Attention should be paid to marketing and recruitment practices that could facilitate inclusion of underrepresented groups in IVS. Research on volunteer recruitment indicates that one of the most significant ways to increase volunteering is to directly ask individuals to participate (Anheier & Salamon, 1999; Musick, Wilson, & Bynum, 2000; Rehberg, 2005; Spring et al., 2007). Across all forms of volunteering, individuals tend to learn about volunteer experiences through informal means—typically from someone like themselves talking about their experiences (Wilson, 2000). Returned volunteers often inspire others to participate—thereby playing a potentially important role in recruitment of a more diverse volunteer base.

Experiences from international placement programs in Europe suggest that volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds often experience a "shock effect" and return with a more concrete vision of their worth to society (Adams, Dienst, Schroer, & Stringham, 1996; AVSO, 2003). As they serve in far-away communities, disadvantaged volunteers tend to disassociate themselves with negative labels and stereotypes, develop a strong sense of self-reliance and autonomy, and experience "role-reversal" that empowers them to provide support in ways that are rarely possible domestically. Those who typically feel excluded in their home community may gain a sense of participation and contribution by serving abroad (IVR, 2006).

In particular, racial and ethnic inclusion is a major challenge going forward. Through IVS, persons of color have potential to challenge preexisting stereotypes in the communities they serve, to be influential role models within ethnically diverse communities, and to bring unique insight from their backgrounds into their volunteer placements (Sharma & Bell, 2002; Spring et al., 2007). Speaking of his experience in Nicaragua, one returned Peace Corps volunteer indicated, "They've had Peace Corps

Volunteers before, but I'm the first African American. The high school director…realizes how beneficial it is for black children to have black role models" (Peace Corps, 2005b).

Development of the volunteer role with inclusion of a specific group in mind may be needed as well. Research with older adult volunteers suggests that flexibility in the role requirements is important (Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Sherraden et al., 2003). For example, shorter-term placements may be needed to integrate the influx of older adults who have interests in volunteering abroad (McBride, 2007). Older adults are also most likely to prefer placements that utilize their skills and previous work experience (Foster-Bey, Grimm, & Dietz, 2007).

Conclusion

In this research brief, we demonstrate the scope and prevalence of international volunteering and service worldwide, focusing on US volunteers in particular. In this globalized world, crossing borders in service to humanity is both increasingly possible and desirable.

International service has a rich history in the United States. Research suggests, however, that this opportunity may only exist for some Americans. The Global Service Fellowship bill reinforces this American tradition by expanding access to international volunteering and service, and meeting the current desire of the citizenry to be a positive force in the world (Caprara et al., 2007).

This legislation is an investment that is expected to reap multiple benefits. In addition to positive effects for beneficiaries, communities, and countries in which the Global Service Fellows will serve, these US volunteers will also be changed. Volunteers will increase their understanding of other cultures, learn new languages, and build new skills. In these ways, the Global Service Fellows will return to the United States better prepared to function in and contribute to their own communities, the nation, and the world.

The infrastructure for international volunteering and service is in civil society, through America's nonprofit and faith-based organizations. This legislation supports this infrastructure, expanding the capacity of civic action and oversight to channel citizen effort overseas.

This research brief was supported by statistics collected by the US government. The Current Population Survey annual volunteer supplement is a valuable source of data about international volunteering. This supplement, using a nationally-representative sample, provides a benchmark on international volunteering and service. Additional questions on organizational affiliation and volunteer activities would provide the information needed for more rigorous and systematic analysis of IVS.

In order to gain understanding of the effectiveness of international volunteering, a demonstration evaluation of the Global Service Fellowship program should be funded.

Of particular importance are longitudinal impacts and the effectiveness of efforts to promote inclusion across all groups (gender, age, racial, ethnic, religious, educational, and economic).

Research on international volunteering and service suggests positive impacts from a Global Service Fellowship. Legislation providing $50 million annually for 10,000 Global Service Fellows each year would be a positive investment in our nation's and the world's future.

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