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Volunteering and Policy Makers: The Political Uses of the UK Conservative Party's International Development Volunteering Projects

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Abstract What motivates a political party to develop overseas development volunteering projects for members? How do such activities affect individual volunteers and the party, more broadly? To address these questions, this paper analyses the UK Conservative Party's international development volunteering projects. Our data comprise 38 interviews with former volunteers and participant observation of one volunteering project in Rwanda in 2017 by one author. This predominantly self-reported data are supplemented with publicly available sources. We draw on employer-supported and state-supported volunteering literature to develop a framework for analysing drivers and effects of party-supported volunteering. We argue that political parties are under-researched sending communities, and that development volunteering constitutes a strategic resource that can be invoked to legitimise engagement with, and authority in, international development as part of the everyday political identity of Party members. As such, how volunteering is used to signal authority in a policy area warrants further research.

Keywords Conservative party · Volunteering · International development · Global citizenship

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Introduction

Political parties often rely on volunteers to generate support and visibility for candidates during elections and to mobilise communities around local campaigns (Lees-Marchment and Pettitt 2014). We are, however, interested here in a different form of volunteering by party members, particularly those occupying or seeking elected office. The UK Conservative Party has gone significantly beyond typical party engagement with volunteers, institutionalising overseas development volunteering by its members within a party framework through its time in opposition and government. Specifically, since 2007, the Party has organised hundreds of self-funded volunteering placements in developing states for its members. The jewel in the crown of these efforts is Project Umubano, with over 300 Party members, including serving and former Members of Parliament, Councillors, Party staff and activists, having volunteered since 2007 on projects in Rwanda, Burundi and Sierra Leone. A second set of volunteering activities, Project Maja, has also been undertaken in Europe and South Asia, though data on the activities and participants for these are comparatively less accessible.

Development volunteering is of course extensively researched; we know a great deal about what motivates volunteers for development and the personal and professional benefits they hope to gain from the experience. What we know far less about, however, is political party-supported volunteering of the kind represented by Project Umubano. Moreover, Umubano was institutionalised during a period in which the Conservative Party increased its engagement with development issues, and little is known of the volunteering projects' role in building commitment to, and projecting authority on, this policy area. This paper begins to address these gaps in knowledge. It provides an

appraisal of the Party's international development volunteering projects, with a particular focus on Umubano, presenting new data on the motives of project founders, volunteers' perceptions of how volunteering has affected them and the Party, and how they use this experience in parliament debates to claim authority in policy areas related to development volunteering, particularly international development.

Our dataset—discussed further in the "Methods" section—includes participant observation, interviews with former volunteers and written material pertaining to the volunteering projects. It allows us to interrogate: (1) self-reported motivations behind Project Umubano by its founders; (2) self-reported impacts on volunteers and the Party; and (3) how the volunteering experience has been articulated within parliament debates to support claims to authority and expertise. The motivations are solely self-reported, while the impacts are corroborated with anecdotal evidence of post-volunteering activities. Within parliament debates, we have analysed how opposing parties respond when the experience is brought up to ascertain whether it is acknowledged as a source of legitimacy on relevant topics. This approach does not provide robust evidence of impacts, but rather a preliminary understanding of the motives behind, and utility of, development volunteering for a political party, an area of research not previously addressed in volunteering literature. To gain such insights, we are guided by the following research questions:

> What motivated project founders to launch the volunteering projects?
> What impacts do volunteers claim that the volunteering experience has had on them individually and on the Party more widely?
> How is the volunteering experience used by volunteers in a party-political setting, including in parliament debates?

Answering these questions is made somewhat challenging by the lack of research on similar programmes by other parties. In light of this, we draw inspiration from state-sponsored international volunteering initiatives, such as the US Peace Corps, and from employer-supported volunteering (ESV) initiatives, whereby employers in the public or private sector enable and encourage employees to volunteer within working hours. Though there are significant differences between political parties on the one hand, and employers or government organisations on the other, we argue that there are some important similarities in how they approach the organisation of volunteering and in the benefits they anticipate for the sending community and the volunteers. All three sending communities take much or all of the responsibility for finding partner organisations who can host volunteers. They negotiate the terms of the

engagement, including how long volunteers will be based with partner organisations and what kinds of activities they will undertake. They take much of the administration out of volunteering and as such they facilitate, authorise and legitimise the activity, as well as providing a safety net and reassurance for those taking part. Another similarity, shared primarily between employers and political parties, is that volunteering is encouraged within particular organisational and hierarchical structures, which may add a pressure to volunteer in addition to endogenous motivations. These similarities have underpinned our decision to further explore the existing research on ESV and state-sponsored volunteering when seeking to answer our research questions.

The paper proceeds in seven sections. We first explore what existing research can tell us about possible motives for, and impacts of, political party-supported volunteering. We then provide a brief overview of the Conservative Party's engagement with international development from 1997 to 2017. We establish how this sending community has engaged with international development and, in this context, how development volunteering was deployed by the Party to support broader processes of Party modernisation and policy change. This is particularly important as the Party's commitment to international development is poorly explained by existing British Politics scholarship (Beswick and Hjort 2019). In the "Methods" section we discuss our data collection and analysis methods. The "Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Motives of the Sending Community" section presents the analysis of our data, focusing on self-reported party motives. The "Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Volunteer Perceptions of Impacts" section sets out the impacts on individual volunteers, drawing on self-reported outcomes and additional evidence sources. The "Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Impacts on the Party and Policy" section reflects on the link between volunteering and the Party's engagement with international development. Based on our evidence, we do not claim that the Party programme of development volunteering can explain Party commitment to international development. Instead, we argue that partaking in development volunteering projects has legitimised and normalised engagement with international development as part of the everyday political identity of Party members. This is a significant shift from the previous situation in the Party (Beswick and Hjort 2019). Finally, the "Conclusion" reiterates key claims and limitations.

International Development Volunteering and Sending Communities: Motives, Expectations and Effects

This section outlines existing research on the motives for, and impacts of, volunteering initiatives, and establishes a framework of motivation and impact categories that structure the forthcoming analysis.

Volunteering initiatives are often motivated by a desire to achieve a positive impact for host communities (Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus 2013; Volunteering England 2011). To this end, both the US Peace Corps and the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) place emphasis on providing technical assistance (McBride and Daftary 2005; Okabe 2016). Another motivation, prevalent in employer-supported volunteering literature, is to improve the reputation and goodwill of the sending organisation (Booth et al. 2009; Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus 2013; Caligiuri et al. 2013; Rodell et al. 2015). Moreover, employers frequently discuss the ways in which volunteering is intended to enhance the team-working ability, skills and attitude of employees (Booth et al. 2009; Muthuri et al. 2009; Rochester et al. 2010). International volunteering is often promoted to enhance cross-cultural understanding (Lyons et al. 2012) and sensitise volunteers to development issues (Davies and Lam 2009). This resonates with global citizenship, which 'signifies the way in which one's identity and ethical responsibility is not limited to their "local" community (i.e. family, nation)' but goes beyond this narrow geographical focus (Jefferess 2008, p. 27). The US Peace Corps has aspects of global citizenship in its formal aims. Though it has been criticised for being a vehicle of US soft power during the Cold War, its aims include an aspiration to increase intercultural understanding (Jackson and Adarlo 2016; McBride and Daftary 2005). Likewise, the JOVS aims to promote friendship and mutual understanding, and to widen the perspective of young Japanese people (Okabe 2014, 2016).

Several of these motivational categories often feature in volunteering initiatives, but research into volunteering outcomes suggests that they do not always translate into observable impacts. There is a large literature on impacts and here we focus on 'inward'-oriented impacts on volunteers and the sending community. This literature has shown that individual volunteers can establish new connections (Muthuri et al. 2009) and develop their professional and soft skills (Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus 2013, p. 5), and more hours volunteering is 'associated with more perceived skills acquired from volunteering' (Booth et al. 2009, p. 24). International volunteering initiatives can lead to impacts corresponding to global citizenship. They can help nurture an increased cultural awareness, a heightened consciousness of the importance of global social justice (Bentall et al. 2010; Cross 1998) and an increased sense of responsibility to take action in the world and facilitate social and economic development (Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) 2005; Lough et al. 2009; Sherraden et al. 2008).

However, there is also research that is much more cautious in its conclusions. Global citizenship developed through the volunteering experience can be highly individualised, anti-political and not conducive to reflecting on structural and social justice issues (Mostafanezhad 2014; Smith and Laurie 2011). This type of global thinking is one where a privileged *Self* aspires to help a deprived *Other* without thinking too much about what caused privilege and deprivation in the first place. Similar research argues that volunteering can reaffirm rather than challenge cultural identities (Jefferess 2012) and reproduce negative stereotypes (Davies and Lam 2009). Such issues appear to be more acute for short-term volunteering projects as they emphasise short-term one-way 'helping' over mutual learning (Howard and Burns 2015; Salazar 2004), which is important to highlight given the limited time that Conservative Party members spend overseas. There is also literature that discusses global citizenship and related terms such as cosmopolitanism as a performative act (Jeffrey 2008; Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008; Smith et al. 2013). Instead of a strong or weak internalisation, the focus in performativity research shifts to how claims of global citizenship or cosmopolitanism can function 'as a strategic resource: as a set of imaginaries that can be used to extend opportunities or consolidate power' (Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008, p. 420). Jeffrey (2008), for example, discusses how Serb nationalist political parties in Bosnia advanced a particular European cosmopolitan vision and pitted this against other parties. Here, the level of proven internationalisation is secondary to the political uses of the vision. This is of crucial interest to this study since it will interrogate the political utility of recounting volunteering experiences in a party-political setting.

Research into impacts on a sending community as a whole, such as a party or a company, has received limited scholarly attention. That said, Rodell et al. (2015) illustrate that volunteering supported by employers can improve company reputation and increase company attractiveness for consumers (Rodell et al. 2015). Another study found that employee volunteering is positively related to the volunteering behaviour of colleagues (Peloza et al. 2009). Finally, it has been suggested that international volunteering 'could enhance capacity to solve local, domestic, and international conflicts, and encourage support for development aid' (Sherraden et al. 2008). Increased support for development aid is one of a range of impacts that may be applicable to the Conservative Party but, as

explained above, this project is limited to providing new insights into the self-reported motives behind the Conservative Party's volunteering initiatives (RQ 1), self-reported impacts on volunteers corroborated with anecdotal evidence, self-reported impacts on the Party (RQ 2), and an interrogation into how the claims of impacts are used to project authority and legitimacy in a party-political setting (RQ 3).

Despite these limitations, this paper makes an original contribution through its unique focus on a political party as a sending community. To this end, we draw the relevant motivation and impact categories from the above research together into a framework allowing us to explore the volunteering initiatives of the Conservative Party. We extract the following motive categories and subject to analysis: (1) *benefits for the host community*; (2) *benefits for the individual volunteer*, such as new skills or a strengthened global citizenship; and any perceived (3) *benefits for the Party as a whole*. We also draw on impact categories to structure the forthcoming analysis, though we omit impacts on host communities as that is beyond the scope of the study. We consider (1) *impacts on individual volunteers* in terms of new skills and connections, and focus extensively on global citizenship. Here we analyse self-reported impacts in the form of an increased awareness of, and commitment to, international development. Drawing on the performativity research discussed above, we also analyse the ways in which global citizenship is articulated to project authority on development issues within UK parliament debates. Finally, we discuss the (2) *benefits arising from this to the Party* in terms of speaking with authority on this particular policy agenda. Before doing so, however, the next section gives a brief introduction to the Conservative Party and its engagement with development as a policy issue.

Setting

In order to understand the decision to begin a sustained programme of development volunteering in 2007, we need to briefly explore how development came to feature prominently in contemporary Conservative Party policy. The General Election of 1997 saw the Conservative Party lose power following a Labour Party landslide. Under the Conservatives, international development had been part of the remit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Labour established a new separate Department for International Development (DfID), and over the subsequent decade carved out a leadership role for the UK in international development. From 1997 to 2005 the Conservative engagement with international development was limited, mainly focusing on countries with which the UK had

strong historical ties such as South Africa and Zimbabwe (Beswick 2019). This changed under Michael Howard, the first Conservative leader to pledge support for working towards a target of spending 0.7% of GNI on overseas development assistance. This rather unexpected shift in engagement with an otherwise neglected policy sphere was prompted partly by pragmatic appreciation of the development role Labour and DfID had created for the UK on a global stage. It was, however, also informed by Howard's witnessing of the UK public response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and by the significant level of public engagement with the Make Poverty History mass movement, which developed around the 2005 G8 summit at Gleneagles (Beswick 2019). The campaign was an effort by aid and development agencies to create increased public awareness and research suggests it had a positive effect. The DfID-funded public Perceptions of Poverty research programme found that the share of the public 'very concerned' with 'poverty in poor countries' was 32% in 2005 (Darnton 2006, p. 8), compared to the pre-millennial level of 17% (Darnton and Kirk 2011, p. 16). By 2007 Howard had thus begun to present the argument that not only was support for international development consistent with Conservative values, but also that the UK public now expected any serious party to have a clear and well-developed position on this policy area.

In 2005, following a third consecutive general election defeat for the Conservatives, David Cameron became Conservative Party leader. His campaign slogan, 'Change to Win', summed up his core argument—the Party needed not only to change but also to show the public the veracity of this change. He embarked on a programme of party modernisation aimed at changing voter perceptions and shifting the 'nasty party' image in favour for one of 'compassionate Conservatism' (Beswick 2019). The perception of the Party as nasty is often associated with Margaret Thatcher and subsequent governments, due in part to her opposition to sanctions against the Apartheid regime, and a range of allegations of misconduct among senior Party members, leading to several resignations. Though the Labour Party has also been accused of misconduct, such as receiving improper donations, the particular stamp of a nasty party was reserved for the Conservative Party, as acknowledged by Theresa May at the 2002 party conference (Heppel and Lightfoot 2012). As part of efforts to change voter perceptions, Cameron extolled the virtues of volunteering and civic engagement, including through his 'big society' campaign theme, whilst also pledging support for the 0.7% aid spending target. Along with his shadow Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, and Party Chairman, Francis Maude, Cameron developed an overseas social action project, Project Umubano. This short-term volunteering project first took

place in 2007 and would, in the subsequent decade, become a regular feature of Conservative Party activity. Party members, ranging from MPs and members of the House of Lords to Councillors, staff and activists, spent 2–3 weeks of the summer volunteering, according to their skills, in health centres, business projects, parliamentary staff training, construction and teaching English, football or cricket. The volunteers lived together in basic accommodation, working alongside civil society, civil servants and parliamentary staff in their projects by day and, by night and on weekends, socialising together, visiting local markets and tourist attractions or taking part in organised activities including visits to Rwandan genocide memorials and film screenings.

The project was not reported favourably in the UK media, particularly as Cameron's first visit to Rwanda coincided with flooding in his home constituency of Witney. Nevertheless, despite this negative coverage by traditionally Conservative-supporting media outlets, the Party maintained Project Umubano and even extended it, with sister projects in Sierra Leone and Burundi under the Umubano banner and the launch, in 2010, of a second branch of overseas social action—Project Maja—with activities primarily in South Asia and Europe (Beswick and Hjort 2019). These projects were partly self-financed by volunteers but also subsidised by generous donations from Party backers. UK public awareness of the projects was minimal, coloured by negative press reporting, and their value in improving public perceptions of the Party brand is not easily ascertained. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier, sending communities who spend time, money and organisational energy on these projects have expectations about how they will benefit the sender and the individuals. Following a discussion of methods we will explore what our new empirical data reveal about these expectations and effects in the case of Umubano and, to a lesser extent, Maja.

Methods

In seeking to understand the motives for, and impacts of, volunteering, we use three main sources of evidence, the gathering of which was approved by the University of Birmingham social sciences ethical review committee. First, between April and November 2017, we conducted 38 individual interviews, face-to-face or via telephone, with former volunteers. These are alumni of Projects Umubano (34) and Maja (7), with some having participated in more than one trip across both projects. The interviewees included 18 current or former MPs, five current or former Councillors, three members of the House of Lords and two MEPs. Within the sample, we spoke to individuals who had

held influential positions in formulating or scrutinising UK development policy, including two former Party Chairmen; one former Secretary of State for International Development; three former International Development Ministers; and four former or current members of the House of Commons Select Committee on International Development.

The project leaders estimate that well over 300 unique volunteers have participated, but were unable to provide the names and contact details of former participants due to data protection regulations. Potential interviewees were instead identified by reviewing parliamentary debates for mentions of 'Umubano' and 'Maja', and reports on these projects published by the Party and in online and print news. The sample is thus not necessarily representative of a larger group and, inevitably, self-selecting, with a skew towards those who have spoken publicly about their involvement in volunteering and who clearly value it. To mitigate this and capture perspectives of those who were involved but did not subsequently write publicly about their experiences, we asked interviewees to identify others they had volunteered with and approached them for interview. All interviewees gave informed written consent to participate. They were also offered the option of remaining anonymous.

Secondly, to access a wider range of volunteer experiences, participant observation was conducted by one of the researchers, Danielle Beswick, during the August 2017 Project Umubano visit to Rwanda, in which she participated as an English tutor. Her involvement as a volunteer included attending pre-departure briefings at Conservative Party Headquarters and a post-volunteering reunion at the 2017 Party Conference. This provided opportunities to speak with volunteers before, during and after the visit, including with those who had not been interviewed for the project. No data from this trip are attributed to any individual without written permission. The final category of evidence consists of reports and other public materials, including Umubano annual reports; webpages corroborating post-volunteering activities; volunteers' written accounts of their experiences; and Hansard records of parliamentary debate contributions.

A thematic analysis was undertaken on the interview and participant observation data. Three themes were deduced from the research questions: *motivations* (T1), *impacts on volunteers* (T2) and *impacts on the Party* (T3). To code the dataset into smaller themes, we deduced sub-themes from the framework developed through the literature review. The sub-themes on motivations are: *benefits for the host community* (T1-1), *benefits for the individual volunteer* (T1-2), and *benefits for the Party* (T1-3). The sub-themes on impacts on volunteers are: *benefits in the form of new skills and connections* (T2-1), and *global*

citizenship (T2-2). No sub-themes on party impacts were developed as there was insufficient data to support clear themes. We also developed miscellaneous themes for residual data pertaining to either motivations or impacts, and subsequently collated the coded dataset into the given themes. This was done manually without coding software. The miscellaneous themes were abandoned in this process since the sub-themes were broad enough to house the stated motivations and impacts discovered in the dataset.

When conducting analysis based on these themes, we included anecdotal evidence of post-volunteering activities in some sections to achieve a degree of corroboration of self-reported impacts. This evidence does not conclusively establish whether volunteers have developed or increased their sense of global citizenship, or whether the Party has changed its policies as a consequence of the volunteering experience. Instead, it verifies claims about specific post-volunteering activities, including setting up development/ charity projects. Excerpts from parliament debates are also included in the analysis. They provide evidence of how former volunteers draw on their experiences to signal authority on development and how opposing parties react to this, thus illustrating the use of volunteering experience within debating strategies, an area hitherto not considered in literature on international volunteering.

Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Motives of the Sending Community

Our analysis of why the Conservative Party launched the volunteering projects suggested three broad motivational themes: (1) benefits for the host community, (2) benefits for the individual volunteer and (3) benefits for the Party. This analysis is presented in this section, with subheadings developed for each theme. Due to the limited number of respondents that participated in Maja, and because those respondents had not held leadership positions in the project, the following motives categories almost exclusively contain responses from Umubano alumni, whereas the sections presenting impacts include respondents from Maja.

Benefits for the Host Community

Andrew Mitchell MP, the main architect of Umubano and former Secretary of State for International Development, expressed a range of motivations for launching Umubano, one of which was to do 'a tiny bit of good in a country

that's been to hell and back'.[1] Rwanda was chosen, he claimed, because it 'was small enough for us to have a very modest impact and safe enough … and at a stage in development where we could operate there'.[2] Stephen Crabb MP who took over leadership of Umubano in 2010 similarly argued that one idea behind the project was to use 'people with real skills to work … albeit very short periods of time, 2 or 3 weeks, in very focused situations to basically add value to the skills and experience of counterparts in Rwanda and also Sierra Leone'.[3] This stated motivation to provide benefits for host communities is not surprising and is a common feature when employers and states advertise their volunteering initiatives (Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus 2013; McBride and Daftary 2005).

To add value, the project initially had five components: (1) a private sector project focused on incubating entrepreneurialism and teaching business ethics and skills; (2) a law project that trained Rwandan lawyers and worked with the Justice Department; (3) a medical project that delivered health services and trained Rwandan counterparts; (4) a teaching project that taught English and trained teachers; (5) and finally a residual category that decorated and built items for an already procured community centre.[4] The leadership of Umubano was confident that skills could be transferred and value added through such targeted activities. In their view, then, the project would be far more substantial than a mere attempt to improve the image of the Party and make it appear more appealing to voters. They were also, however, careful not to overstate the impact of the projects. This is reflected in Mitchell's phrasing that the project can do 'a little bit of good'. In the pre-departure briefing for volunteers on the 2017 Project Umubano trip, this exact phrasing was repeated by the project leaders, alongside an emphasis on the activities being designed with Rwandan partners and in some cases embedded in existing Rwandan government programmes. As far as we could ascertain no systematic evaluation, independent or otherwise, was undertaken of the impacts of the volunteering, which could have measured any benefits of the projects. Nevertheless, these claims featured strongly in the public statements of rationale for the projects, including in recruiting new volunteers.

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[1] Author interview with Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP, former Secretary of State for International Development (2010–2012) and founder of Project Umubano, Sutton Coldfield, 21/04/17.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Author interview with Stephen Crabb MP, former organiser of Project Umubano, London, 17/07/17.

[4] Author interview with Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP (see note 2).

Benefits for the Individual Volunteer

Andrew Mitchell claimed that he had two types of benefits in mind for volunteers when he set up Umubano. On the one hand, he wanted to provide 'a life-changing experience'.[5] Our interviews demonstrated that in many cases it was not only high-ranking Party members that volunteered but also members of their families, and that this was the first time many had lived and worked in an African country, albeit briefly. Travelling to Rwanda, learning about the genocide and supporting concrete projects was envisioned to provide a lasting memory and perhaps also new skills of use back home. This was, however, secondary. Many respondents argued that the primary aim was to nurture an increased understanding of international development by exposing volunteers to a developing country and the issues it faces. Though this may be considered a benefit for each volunteer, there is an aim here to affect the party at an aggregate level: project leaders sought to build a like-minded community of development champions that could provide strategic benefits beyond the individual. Mitchell claimed that the intention was to build 'a cadre, a core of people who had been to a poor country, formed their own views about what worked, and what didn't work in international development and brought to the Conservative Party humanity, expertise and understanding of development issues'.[6] Repeating this point, Stephen Crabb explained that the intention was 'to build a cohort of people who had tasted it, had lived it and breathed it and would be champions for this policy area'.[7] The leadership had an explicit intention to expose and sensitise Party members to the realities and importance of international development, which is very similar to other volunteering initiatives that seek to nurture global citizenship (Davies and Lam; Lyons et al. 2012). Both Mitchell and Crabb stressed that host community impacts were key, but an equally important intention was to educate volunteers so that they would champion international development and support commitment to this issue within the Party as a whole.

Benefits for the Party

As discussed earlier, The Conservative Party in opposition had sought to modernise and rebrand itself as a more compassionate party, including by developing 'an authentically centre-right view on development'.[8] This begs the question, did the volunteering projects lead to a step change in Party policy or was it more about cosmetic rebranding? Stephen Crabb expressed a view echoed by many of our interviewees, that the two are not mutually exclusive and that Cameron had both in mind with Umubano: it 'wasn't just about PR [public relations], how we are seen—of course it's about that, but he genuinely believed there was a body of policy that … needed to change quite radically'.[9] While we will discuss how they envisioned Umubano to be part of this policy shift below, the point we make here is that the leadership was 'of course' aware of the PR potential of the project. Similar sentiments were echoed by respondents outside of project leadership. One experienced volunteer argued that the motivation had 'been much more than just detoxifying the Party'.[10] Others discussed a range of motivations, some of which have to do with rebranding the Party image: Cameron 'wanted to show a softer side to the Party';[11] and it was 'important to demonstrate or even to reclaim that we [the Party] weren't as we were portrayed [i.e. a nasty party]'.[12] Creating a positive image for the Party was thus a stated motivation behind Umubano, but it was presented as a secondary motive going hand in hand with objectives of positive impacts for the host community and a more transformative impact on participants and Party. The presence of several coexisting motivations is consistent with ESV literature, which highlights that a sending community can be motivated by improving a company's image through signalling specific values, while also seeking to provide tangible benefits for the host community (Rochester et al. 2010; Rodell et al. 2015).

Alongside image-related benefits, Project leaders expected practical benefits for the Party, including building on a legacy of increasing engagement by the Party leadership with international development. As discussed earlier, engagement with international development and support for the 0.7% of GNI aid spending target preceded the volunteering projects. The envisioned role of the volunteer champions was instead to support and defend this ongoing policy change. They would continue the work of Howard, Cameron, Mitchell and others, defending aid spending when under critique from the popular press or within their own ranks (Beswick and Hjort 2019). In such situations project organisers argued that the Party needed people in the 'Party, in parliament, in the volunteer membership, who could stand up and say, "No, no, this is a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Author interview with Stephen Crabb MP (see note 4).

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Author interview with Pauline Latham MP, member of the House of Commons International Development Select Committee (2010–2015, 2015–2017, 2017–ongoing), Derby, 14/07/17.

[11] Author interview with Councillor David Millican, Ealing Town Hall, 10 May 2017.

[12] Author telephone interview with former MP, 5 June 2017, anonymity requested.

good thing; this is in our national interests to do, it's the right thing to do"'.[13] These defenders would provide a bulwark against critics and champion Conservative Party engagement, which they defended as being in the UK's national interest,[14] claiming for example that mutual benefits through trade would arise.[15] It was presented as a moral responsibility but it was also stressed that aid must be effective and value for money demonstrated.[16] The next two sections consider whether the self-reported motives presented thus far correspond to impacts as articulated by our respondents.

Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Volunteer Perceptions of Impacts

We present impacts on volunteers according to our thematic analysis, the first theme being 'new skills and connections', which briefly considers self-reported impacts in terms of personal growth and new contacts. The second theme is 'global citizenship', in which we elaborate on volunteers' claims of increased global citizenship, and how this is used within parliament debates and other post-volunteering settings.

New Skills and Connections

Respondents were often wary of discussing to what extent volunteering had helped their professional careers, particularly in recorded interviews. They were, however, more forthcoming in informal discussions, both one-to-one and in small groups, during the course of the Rwanda volunteering project in 2017. Many validated one of Andrew Mitchell's initial motivations, explaining that volunteering was a profound experience that had cemented a 'unique bond' and friendship among participants.[17] At annual Party conferences and social events, volunteers would seek each other out, reminiscing on past experience and discussing current professional circumstances. Some had put the new connections they had gained to use in a professional context. For example, one respondent had a discussion with one of the project leaders and was encouraged to become an election observer. The project leader provided a reference for the volunteer, who has since observed elections in four countries.[18] Beyond new connections, volunteers felt

that they had gained new skills and ideas, a perception common in ESV literature (Booth et al. 2009; Brooks and Schlenkhoff-Hus 2013). A direct example of skills transfer was given by an MP who was intrigued by the method of doing social action projects. He later introduced the method in his home constituency under the banner of 'pavement politics', rallying people on weekends to do 'nitty gritty' work such as picking up street litter.[19] Another MP described developing a similar set of social action projects in his constituency,[20] while a third recalled the Party organising similar activities around annual conferences in Birmingham and Manchester.[21] While these accounts from respondents suggest a range of self-reported impacts, the next section goes a little further, detailing further impacts and providing some independent evidence of volunteers' subsequent engagement with development activities.

Global Citizenship

Global citizenship 'signifies the way in which one's identity and ethical responsibility is not limited to their "local" community (i.e. family, nation)' (Jefferess 2008, p. 27). If global citizenship is cultivated through volunteering, it could be a valuable stepping stone towards embedding the development champions that Umubano project founders claim they sought to nurture. However, some respondents rejected the notion that volunteering had made a strong impact in terms of how they think about development. The values driving one respondent to take part in Umubano had, he reported, been present since childhood: 'I have been doing stuff which I thought was useful … since I was a kid and it was part of the values and the way I was brought up … long before I was ever introduced to the term social action [project]'.[22] Another respondent similarly discussed the possibility that those partaking in volunteering projects might 'have some interest, at least at a very general sense, in the wider world before they commit to it [volunteering]'.[23] Volunteers might therefore be a 'self-selecting subset of the Conservative Party', comprising individuals that are already interested in international development.[24] The respondent nevertheless argued that regardless of their

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Author interview with Stuart Andrew MP, House of Commons, 18 July 2017.

[16] Author interview with Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP (see note 2).

[17] Author interview with Suella Fernandes MP, House of Commons, 25 October 2017.

[18] Author interview with John Detre, former Councillor, London, 20 July 2017.

[19] Author telephone interview with former MP, anonymity requested, 4 September 2017.

[20] Author telephone interview with Andrew Jones MP, 12 May 2017.

[21] Author interview with Mark Pawsey MP, Rugby, 31 August 2017.

[22] Author interview with Councillor Timothy Barnes, London, 24 July 2017.

[23] Author interview via Skype with Richard Honey, barrister with Frances Taylor Building Chambers, 19 July 2017.

[24] Ibid.

level of initial interest, the experience made Party members 'far better informed and far more warmly disposed towards international development and the 0.7% commitment'.[25] This was echoed by another volunteer who stated that 'I am happy to support the 0.7% GDP spend on international development because of what I've seen'.[26] A further respondent explained that 'it has definitely made me think that we have a role to play; and also, the UK is very privileged … if we are able to play a positive role, for me, that's absolutely a good thing'.[27] Speaking about aid spending, an MP who had participated in Project Maja argued that volunteering 'makes you quite passionate that this money is important … [but] not just the money side … actually our involvement and trying to ensure a peaceful end to the wars going on in Syria, for example … it does give you a different perspective'.[28]

In making such statements, respondents invoke global citizenship as they claim a degree of responsibility or care for people beyond their local or national community. However, this citizenship often resonated with the geopolitical discourse of Northern givers and Southern benefactors described by Mostafanezhad (2014). A respondent quoted above reflected on the privileged position of the UK and how this should lead to a more positive role internationally. Similarly, an MP argued that 'it is about us really thinking more globally, thinking about … how we can help. Also, you know, about building up these economies so that we've got other countries that we can start trading with'.[29] Aside from the UK self-interest rationale on trade benefits, the form of global citizenship invoked here is one where a privileged *Self* aspires to help a deprived *Other* without thinking too much about what caused privilege and deprivation in the first place. Respondents seldom articulated ideas deviating from this position, but it is nevertheless the case that the realisation of a privileged *Self* could lead to increased commitment to aid spending and international development.

One example of such commitment to international development is legacy projects, initiatives that continue independently of the volunteering project. The Project Umubano 10 Year Legacy report documents a range of such initiatives (Mabbutt 2017). In Burundi, several volunteers visited an orphanage with Umubano. When the country was dropped from the programme due to security concerns, volunteers continued to travel there and set up a UK-based charity to support the orphanage.[30] Other

volunteers were introduced to the Survivors Fund (SURF)—which works to support survivors of the genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda—through Umubano, and some have since become SURF trustees and continue to support it, including through visits outside the Umubano framework.[31] Finally, another volunteer met the President of the Sierra Leone Bar Association when volunteering and has since supported pro bono work in Sierra Leone, chairing the steering group of the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network. While the network is separate from Umubano, the volunteer explained that '[p]roject Umubano was part of the catalyst for that [and] has been part of the reason why it has continued and done well'.[32] We do not claim that volunteering has produced a commitment to international development where none previously existed on the basis of these legacy projects. It is possible that volunteers were self-selecting Party members with an ongoing interest in international development. We instead suggest that the volunteering projects, at the very least, provided a vehicle allowing volunteers to sustain their commitment and hone relevant skills to this end.

Another post-volunteering activity often cited by our respondents is that they have spoken about their experiences 'to community groups, to church groups, to school groups',[33] 'in parliament',[34] 'in [their] constituency … [and in] Rotary … or Probus Clubs'.[35] Uniting these respondents is a claim to be able to speak with more authority and legitimacy on subjects such as volunteering, international development and the value and impact of aid spending. Their claims of subsequent parliamentary engagement can be corroborated by looking at online debate transcripts. Project Maja has been discussed in parliament debates on topics such as the Western Balkans and the Srebrenica Genocide,[36] while Umubano has been mentioned 33 times in nineteen parliament debates, including on topics such as foreign aid, global poverty and the SDGs.[37] Of the eighteen MPs discussing Umubano in

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Author interview with Mark Pawsey MP (see note 22).

[27] Author telephone interview with Krystal Miller, former Councillor, 19 July 2017.

[28] Author interview with Stuart Andrew MP (see note 16).

[29] Ibid.

[30] Author interview with Adrian Veale, Birmingham, 13 May 2017; See http://www.orphanageofhearts.org/.

[31] Author interview with Will Goodhand, former Conservative candidate, London 27 July 2017; See https://survivors-fund.org.uk.

[32] Author interview via Skype with Richard Honey (see note 24); See https://www.ftbchambers.co.uk/news/richard-honey-sierra-leone.

[33] Author telephone interview with Andrew Jones MP (see note 21).

[34] Author interview with Stuart Andrew MP (see note 16).

[35] Author telephone interview with Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne MP, former Minister of State for International Development (2014–2016), 25 April 17.

[36] See https://hansard.parliament.uk/search/Contributions?searchTerm=MAJA and https://hansard.parliament.uk/search/Contributions?searchTerm=MAYA.

[37] See https://hansard.parliament.uk/search/Contributions?searchTerm=UMUBANO.

parliament, sixteen have participated in at least one volunteering project, and they highlight their experience to add legitimacy to their comments when contributing to debate on international development and related topics. One MP, for example, debated the UK's role in preventing future genocides and protecting civilians, and claimed that the 'introduction to Rwanda has led to a love of the country and its people, and a lifetime commitment to support its future development' (HC Deb 8 May 2014a). Other MPs drew on Umubano to claim that project leaders are strongly committed to international development: '[W]e only have to look at his [Mitchell's] leadership of Project Umubano', an MP argued, 'to see exactly what commitment [to international development] he has. It is a practical commitment and an effective commitment' (HC Deb 1 July 2010).

A third MP explained that she had 'spent many … summers in Rwanda with Project Umubano', visiting 'a project … helping to empower women', and drew on this experience in parliament to 'show the importance of SDG 5 and women and equality' (HC Deb 13 April 2016a). Such statements are not proof that the MPs have nurtured a global citizenship. What they do show, however, is that the experience is used by former volunteers to invoke a sense of global citizenship and commitment to international development. Invoking global citizenship does not mean that it is embodied, but the act of appealing to lived experience when speaking on policy issues may confer additional legitimacy and authority. This is a concrete impact but not one where we can say that the way volunteers think has changed in any objectively verifiable way. Instead, the impact lies in the ability to speak with additional legitimacy and authority. MPs' political identity—the persona portrayed in parliament—is now one that can speak as if global citizenship is embodied. Former volunteers' experiences along with claims of global citizenship could in such cases, much like performativity researchers suggest, be used as a 'strategic resource', 'as a set of imaginaries used to extend opportunities' around specific policy objectives within debates (Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008, p. 420).

To ascertain whether opposing parties acknowledged former volunteers as authoritative and knowledgeable on topics pertaining to development, we analysed how opposing parties responded when the experience was mentioned in the nineteen parliament debates. There was no instance in which the authority and knowledge of volunteers were explicitly called into question. In twelve debates, opposing parties' response did not acknowledge the experience, which is common in parliament as there is no requirement to comment on each point made in a debate

contribution.[38] In six debates, the opposition acknowledged the contribution by former volunteers in a positive manner without explicitly mentioning the volunteering project.[39] For example, Meg Hillier, a Labour and Co-operative Party MP, was of the view that former volunteer Fiona Bruce 'made a number of sensible points about jobs' when she discussed her experience of teaching business entrepreneurship during Umubano (HC Deb 21 March 2013). Likewise, Labour MP Mike Kane argued that Wendy Morton, another former volunteer, 'made a very powerful speech', when she drew on her Umubano experience to discuss the importance of the fifth SDG goal on gender equality and empowerment (HC Deb 13 April 2016b).

There was also one debate in which Ian Lucas of the Labour Party commented on interventions by Damian Hinds and Brooks Newmark. Newmark recounted his Umubano experience and how he subsequently set up a charity and built a school in Rwanda, and Lucas acknowledged that Newmark 'recounted matters from his deep knowledge', paying 'tribute to him for the work that he is doing with his charity and school' (HC Deb 8 May 2014b). Lucas also argued that Hinds 'made an excellent speech in which he talked about the importance of the responsibility to protect', acknowledging that '[Hinds'] reflections on Rwanda were based on having visited it' (HC Deb 8 May 2014c). This anecdotal evidence is not enough to claim that opposing parties perceive former volunteers to be more authoritative and knowledgeable on international development. However, it does show that several MPs from opposing parties that compete for authority on these topics have positively validated the debate contributions from volunteer alumni. They have done so instead of seeking to call into question any claims of global citizenship, for example by honing in on the short duration of the volunteering trips or their public relations potential. A potential explanation for this positive validation is that the duration of the trips might not be well known; MPs from opposing partied did not comment on the length of the volunteering experience. Moreover, appealing to lived experience may be particularly effective in a debate setting if the opposition lacks such experience. Two or three weeks—the short duration of the trips—may not impress those with long-term volunteering experience, but MPs with zero

[38] See HC Debs: 24 November 2010, Volume 519; 12 July 2012, Volume 548; 22 October 2012, Volume 740; 19 November 2012, Volume 553; 16 July 2014, Volume 584; 12 September 2014, Volume 585; 10 December 2015, Volume 603; 13 June 2016, Volume 611; 15 June 2016, Volume 611; 18 November 2016, Volume 776; 13 June 2018, Volume 642; 9 April 2019, Volume 658.
[39] See HC Debs: 1 July 2010, Volume 512; 24 January 2013, Volume 557; 21 March 2013, Volume 560; 11 December 2014, Volume 589; 13 April 2016, Volume 608; 1 July 2019, Volume 662.

volunteering experience might consider their counterparts as more experienced than themselves. The effectiveness of lived experience as a debate strategy warrants further attention, but it is suggested here that it may function as a strategic resource that confers additional legitimacy and authority. The next, penultimate, section discusses whether and how the volunteering projects have impacted the Party beyond the impacts on individual volunteers.

Conservative Party Development Volunteering: Impacts on the Party and Policy

Our respondents claim that the volunteering projects have helped facilitate a unique bond among volunteers, and we have shown that some volunteers discuss the projects when debating development policy in parliament or speaking in other venues. The projects are thus invoked to establish, as Mitchell put it, the Party's 'permission to be heard on development' by the British public.[40] However, as discussed earlier, volunteering projects should not be considered a standalone activity, outwith the wider process of changing Party position on international development. This shift began under Howard, partly in response to concern that a party which did not engage with issues of global poverty and development would be seen as out of touch by the British public (Beswick 2019). Under Cameron's leadership, the volunteering projects can be seen as one element amongst wider efforts to signal commitment to development within the Party and to voters. They function, as we have seen from parliament speeches, as a concrete experience used to invoke legitimacy, credibility and authority on the subject. Beyond volunteering, this commitment was signalled at leadership level by Cameron's role as co-chair of the panel to discuss the successor framework to the Millennium Development Goals. The totemic indicator of Party commitment to development came in 2015, when Cameron successfully campaigned in favour of the UK enshrining its commitment to the 0.7% aid spending target in law.

The Party has continued to stake a strong claim to ownership of international development as a policy issue since achieving power in 2010 (in coalition with the Liberal Democrats) and again in 2015 and 2017, which suggests that commitment to the policy area was not a mere cosmetic exercise to win elections by changing the perception of the Party (Beswick and Hjort 2019). This is reflected in the development of a Conservative Vision for International Development, launched at the 2017 Party conference, and also in the June 2018 launch of the 'Coalition for Global Prosperity', a centre-right

organisation led by former Umubano organiser and chair of the Conservative Friends of International Development, Theo Clarke. A network which includes but is not limited to alumni of the overseas development volunteering projects thus continues to provide both intellectual direction and organisational capacity for the embedding of development engagement within the Party. Reflecting this, the two most recent Development Secretaries by May 2019, Priti Patel and Penny Mordaunt, have not taken part in the volunteering projects, although their parliamentary private secretaries, Wendy Morton and Michael Tomlinson respectively, are both Umubano alumni. Morton was one of the MPs that discussed Umubano in parliament and other alumni in influential positions have done the same. We cannot claim that this network dedicated to development issues is a consequence of Umubano and Maja, but our evidence suggest that the experience allows former volunteers to claim legitimacy and authority when speaking on the subject, and this invoked expertise is carried forward in new projects and strategies. The Conservative Vision for International Development, for example, is co-authored by Umubano organiser Stephen Crabb and references Umubano when stating: 'As people who have seen first-hand the difference that our assistance makes to those who need it, the necessity of British aid is beyond doubt' (Merriman et al. 2017). Our evidence of impacts on the Party, then, suggests that volunteering experience is a strategic resource that increases the ability of volunteers to invoke subject-specific expertise and authority when speaking on development to Parliament and when developing new projects and strategies for this policy area.

Conclusion

This paper set out to analyse the Conservative Party's international volunteering projects by asking three questions:

What motivated project founders to launch the volunteering projects?
What impacts do volunteers claim that the volunteering experience has had on them individually and on the Party more widely?
How is the volunteering experience used by volunteers in a party-political setting, including in parliament debates?

To answer these questions, we advanced an argument that political parties are a similar kind of sending community to employers and states, with some similar expectations about the benefits volunteering will bring to them. We then extracted themes from volunteering literature and used these to analyse the motives behind, and impacts of, the

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[40] Author interview with Rt Hon Andrew Mitchell MP (see note 2).

volunteering projects. We did not analyse impacts on host communities. Instead, we presented new data on self-reported motivations and impacts on individuals and the Party, more widely, and included some additional evidence when discussing impacts. The presented evidence does not allow us to claim an impact on individuals' degree of global citizenship or Party policy. However, our evidence suggests that volunteers refer to the volunteering projects to invoke expertise and signal compassion and empathy when they speak about international development.

This invoked expertise has been particularly useful for the Party because, as our analysis shows, a key motivation behind the volunteering projects was to sensitise volunteers to development issues and increase the Party's engagement with such issues. Though we cannot discern based on the presented data whether this aim was fulfilled, Party members can nevertheless use their experience as a strategic resource and claim authority and increased engagement. Many former volunteers support various international development initiatives and policies alongside other alumni, and they do so with recourse to their volunteering experiences and the connections they have made. The impact we discern, then, is that volunteering constitutes a formidable asset that can be invoked to legitimise engagement with, and authority on, the policy area as part of the everyday political identity of Party members. We acknowledge that further empirical research is needed to complement the findings of this study. Much like Okabe's (2016) study of JOCV, the stated motivations of project leaders must be coupled with more systematic analysis. Impacts on individuals and Party must also be evaluated through further research which compares volunteers to their non-volunteering party peers and compares pre- and post-volunteering engagement with development. Such research would be a valuable complement to this initial study of political party-supported volunteering, which has contributed new knowledge on why a political party might become a volunteer sending community, and how volunteering experience is invoked by Party members as part of their political identity and practice.

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