Summary of the report of the formative evaluation of the Volunteer Cooperation Program (2015–2020)

Commissioned by: Global Citizens, Global Affairs Canada
Consultant: Project Services International in consortium with Plan:Net Limited
Date: August 31, 2018

This evaluation, done midway through the five-year program, helps assess the overall progress toward achieving results. It provides the department and the volunteer cooperation agencies (VCAs) with the information they need to adjust the program, its implementation and plan future programs.

Objectives

The specific objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. evaluate the effectiveness, relevance and sustainability of results;
2. evaluate the efficiency of the Volunteer Cooperation Program (VCP); and
3. provide findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons to inform the implementation of the current program and future program design.

Development context

Major progress has been made in documenting the roles played by volunteers in sustainable development, and, since 2011, in integrating volunteerism into key global development processes. This includes the designation of United Nations Volunteers as the focal point within the United Nations, development of a plan of action to integrate volunteering in peace and development, and inclusion of volunteering in the Sustainable Development Goals. The work of

umbrella groupings of international VCAs, such as the International Forum on Volunteering in Development and the department's Civil Society Partnership Policy, is also important.

Intervention

VCP 2015–2020 is the current five-year-cycle support to volunteer-sending projects implemented by Canadian VCAs in collaboration with their developing country partners (DCPs). The program started on April 20, 2015, and is scheduled to end on March 31, 2020.

The department provide12 72 7vi deC(i)-2(e)410(g)10(s)12,D0(rST0 v)6(or)t to voluntiP 0 Td   0.

The ultimate and intermediate outcomes were included in the VCP call for proposals and are thus

59%— In-field volunteers reporting "considerable" (23%) or "modest" (36%) beneficial change among people/communities identified as beneficiaries

81%—DCPs attributing these beneficial changes to VCA supports (including volunteers) specifically and to a "major" (41%) or "moderate" (40%) extent

Improvements in partner capacity/performance:

86%—DCPs reporting "considerable" (50%) or "modest" (36%) improvement in the way their organizations function (e.g. in relation to program/service delivery, stakeholder engagement, gender equality (GE) policies and practices, governance)

82%—DCPs reporting specific improvements in GE policies and practices to a "major" (48%) or "moderate" (34%) extent; the area of improvement with the highest rating

62%— In-field volunteers reporting "considerable" (22%) or "modest" (40%) improvement in the way their organizations function

69%— In-field volunteers reporting specific improvements in GE policies and practices to a "major" (30%) or "moderate" (39%) extent; the area of improvement with the second-highest rating

88%—DCPs reporting that volunteer contributions have contributed to perceived organizational improvements to a "major" (43%) or "moderate" (45%) extent

Extent rontinuingrnvrvrment ofetur311(ne)3(d)94vrrunteersn internationar deeorpmet arcivritie:

84%—Nortrhsouth volunteers reporting that they are more involved in public awareness raising as a result of being a volunteer in a program like VCP (combining "minor," "moderate" and "major" extent)

On sustaiabiiy:

84%—DCPs trace the attention they pay to ssinability to their partnersip with their VCA to a "major" (40%) or "moderate" (44%) extent

59%—DCPs reporting it "likely" that they could continue the stainability gains already made (25% report the likelihood at fifty-fifty); volunteer perceptionsre sr

Parnendrolunteeeeptions on uref innovaivrercic:

86%—DCPsying that their VCA partnersip wassg them to innovate with new ideas and approaches to a "major" (39%) or "moderate" (47%) extent

76%— In-field and returned volunteers saying that the partnership was innovating with new ideas and approaches to a "major" (32%) or "moderate" (44%) extent

Conclusions*

The VCP, long considered a flagship of Canada's international cooperation effort, has adjusted well to its strategic orientation and grown in size and complexity. While opportunities for improvement are evident, achievements have been considerable and widely appreciated by stakeholders.

Effectiveness

The extent of the progress reasonably matches program expectations for the end of the third year.

also seen to take a significant level of effort, especially regarding programming for major Canadian public engagement events. Differences in sizes of VCAs mean they need a varying amount of time for coordination activities and to be flexible.

Engaging Canadians

VCAs are aware that the scope and depth of their work in developing countries is highly dependent on the extent to which they capture imaginations and support at home. Returning volunteers, empowered by their experience, long or short term, can do a lot to ignite further interest and to free up additional human and financial resources for development. While diaspora communities have been targeted as a source of volunteers from Canada, indigenous peoples as a group have not, thus far.

Innovation

There is an abundance of innovative practice across the scope of the VCP. It manifests in programming approaches and in the tools and techniques used to deliver capacity building and Canadian engagement activities.

Gender equality

Technical support provided by volunteers, especially gender advisers, is essential to the shift in GE awareness and capacity building across the DCPs and beneficiary groups. In many cases, the emphasis on GE has resulted in no tolerance to the absence or non-participation of women and girls in program activities. Furthermore, men have been making progress as champions of GE in their own settings.

Environmental sustainability

The department has appropriately integrated environmental sustainability considerations at multiple levels, from screening proposals, to contracting, to the inclusion of management and reporting requirements. All projects/VCAs are compliant with environmental sustainability requirements of the VCP, though a few require adjustments to their trajectory to ensure yet more favourable outcomes in this respect.

Governance

Overall, the governance crosscutting theme is well integrated and is contributing to more sustainable results for poverty reduction in developing countries. Transparency and accountability are actively promoted by the department and the VCAs, as is GE and social inclusiveness. The VCP is rich in terms of human resources (i.e. VCA and DCP volunteers and staff); however, bilateral projects have additional financial and infrastructure resources which, if brought together, could lead to greater results by 2020.

Key recommendations*

1. That VCAs continue to integrate sustainability planning into their cycles of performance assessment, planning and project design with partners, paying more attention to potential alliances, to networking opportunities, to prospects for developing revenue streams, to proving business cases and to the formulation of exit strategies and system-level learning.
2. That VCAs enhance their engagement with other donor initiatives (Canadian or otherwise), capturing potential for complementarities and added value. Specifically, VCAs should seek opportunities where volunteers can add sectoral expertise and/or advice on technical matters, and/or where bilateral or other-funded projects can lend attributes to VCA-supported activities. This may involve reaching out to the embassies, along with other development partners, for information and assistance, as well as tapping into the expertise of the department at home.
3. That VCAs refine knowledge transfer among themselves, particularly in those countries without functional coordination mechanisms. This should occur around programmatic

- **Encourage coordination, connectivity and networking.** Participation and inclusion allow the program to take full advantage of learning processes and collective brainpower to deliver the best service with the wisest use of resources.
- **Explore the potential for increased engagement of specific communities of learning**, including indigenous peoples, rural Canadian farmers and the diaspora, to expand the potential for reciprocal relationships and contribute to international development practices.

* The findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons presented above are those of the consultant and do not necessarily reflect the views of the department or the Government of Canada. Global Affairs Canada does not guarantee the accuracy of the information provided in this report.

Management response to recommendations

The department response:

1. The department recognizes the importance of integrating sustainable development planning into all project cycles in collaboration with partners.
2. The department supports engagement with other donor initiatives only if this engagement achieves the expected results of the volunteer cooperation project. Such engagement with other initiatives should avoid duplication of human and financial resources and should only be considered if there is real complementarity.
3. The department recognizes that the added value of establishing a coordination mechanism between VCAs by the end of the program will have to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
4. The department recognizes the importance of supporting joint public engagement events on behalf of the VCP.
5. The department recognizes the importance of evaluating Canadian public engagement activities to see if they are sufficiently developed to reach target audiences across the country and to engage return volunteers in program activities.
6. The department recognizes the importance of helping Canadians identify good volunteer practices in international development and inviting them to support the activities of VCAs. The department also recognizes that the VCAs are already doing this work.
7. The department will continue to encourage VCAs, where appropriate, to increase the recruitment of indigenous peoples as volunteers and reciprocal south-north placements and will collect data on this subject from the next annual reports and the final project report of the VCAs.
8. The department recognizes the importance of identifying more explicitly the aspects of the VCP that constitute an innovative practice.
9. The department recognizes the importance of greater collaboration in the design and implementation of training before and during assignments in countries in support of diversity and inclusion.
10. The department recognizes the importance of being proactive in presenting examples of volunteer initiatives directly related to environmental awareness and the elimination or mitigation of environmental harm.

Response from VCAs:

The VCAs took note of the consultant's conclusions and recommendations and shared them within their organizations for consideration in the current iteration of the program.

Language: The final report is available only in English. If you would like a copy of this report, please contact info@international.gc.ca.