

**Are Western Volunteers Reproducing and Reconstructing
the Legacy of Colonialism in Ghana?
An Analysis of the Experiences of Returned Volunteers**

Thomas Roberts

MA Development Studies (Research Training)
Institute for Development Policy and Management
University of Manchester

Declaration

This Dissertation is submitted to the University of Manchester for the Degree of MA Development Studies (Research Training) in the Faculty of Social Science and Law in 2004. With regard to the above, I declare that no proportion of the work referred to in this dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institution of learning.

Tom Roberts

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Table of Contents

	Page	
Declaration	II	
Acknowledgements	III	
Table of Contents	IV	
List of Tables and Figures	VI	
Abstract	VII	
Chapter 1	Introduction	1
1.1	Background	1
1.2	Objectives	1
1.3	Locating the research: Why Ghana?	3
1.4	Research Approach	4
1.5	Chapter Overview	5
Chapter 2	Post-Colonial Theory and the Legacy of Colonialism	7
2.1	Introduction	7
2.2	The Legacy of Colonialism	7
2.3	Post-colonial Theory	9
2.4	Post-Colonial theory and Development agendas	12
2.5	Using Post-colonial Theory to analyses volunteer experiences	14
2.6	Summary	15
Chapter 3	Volunteering and the Wider Development Agenda	16
3.1	Introduction	16
3.2	What is Volunteering?	18
3.3	Categorising International Volunteers	19
3.4	Volunteers and the Era of Development	21
3.5	The Formation of VSO and Peace Corps	23
3.6	The Birth of the Gap Year Phenomenon	25
3.7	Who Benefits from International Volunteering?	27
3.7.1	The Volunteer	28
3.7.2	The Host Community	30
3.8	Summary	31
Chapter 4	Volunteer Experiences	33
4.1	Introduction	33
4.2	Methodology	34
4.3	Interview Design	34
4.4	Results	36
4.4.1	Practicalities Affecting the Success of Volunteer Placements	36

4.4.2	Volunteers' Perceptions about their Skill Level and Suitability for the Job	38
4.4.3	Volunteers Perceptions of their Personal and Social Relationship with the Community	39
4.4.4	Professional Relationships with Colleagues	41
4.4.5	What do Volunteers gain from the Experience?	43
4.5	Summary	44
Chapter 5	Analysis and Limitations	46
5.1	Introduction	46
5.2	Analysis	46
5.2.1	Volunteers: Ambassadors for the West	46
5.2.2	Why do Ghanaians Welcome Volunteers in to their Communities?	47
5.2.3	What can volunteers achieve?	48
5.2.4	Benefits to the volunteer	49
5.3	Limiting factors	50
5.3.1	Problem of definition	50
5.3.2	Volunteers from developing countries	52
Chapter 6	Recommendations and Conclusions	53
6.1	Recommendations	53
6.1.1	Limits on the opportunities available for school leavers and recent graduates without professional experience or qualifications.	53
6.1.2	Encourage Potential Volunteers to Research Agencies and Projects Before Embarking on Them	54
6.1.3	Preparing to Volunteer	55
6.1.4	Programmes should aim to develop partnerships between volunteers and local populations	55
6.2	Conclusions	56
6.2.1	Main Findings	56
APENDIX 1	Interview Guide	59
	Bibliography	61

List of Tables

		Pages
Table 1	Returned volunteers interviewed	34

List of Figures

Figure 1	Overseas Volunteering: Nature of Placement	17
Figure 2	Overseas Volunteering Providers: Placement Fees	20

ABSTRACT

International volunteering is by no means a new phenomenon, however, in recent years there has been an explosion in the number of Westerners travelling to developing countries to engage in volunteer work. The aim of this dissertation is to discuss the possibility that volunteers are reproducing and recreating the legacy of colonialism in Ghana. This research consists of a combination of primary and secondary data, which is used to analyse the volunteers' perceptions of their relationships with the communities that hosted them, the role that they played in the community and the impact on the volunteers' future life choices. The research has been undertaken from a post-colonial perspective which allows the analysis to draw comparisons between contemporary volunteers and the colonial administrators of the past.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Today, according to media sources (Curtis, 2003), a growing number of people from Western countries are taking time out of either education or employment to engage in voluntary work in the developing world. The precise number of volunteers is not known, but currently more than two hundred companies and non-profit organisations in the UK alone, offer gap year projects in poor countries to school and university leavers. Additionally, in 2003, there were 1,500 Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and 6,678 Peace Corps volunteers working in less economically developed countries. The sheer number of volunteers ensures widespread local impact, and changes to volunteers ideas, values and outlooks, may change their lives and profit their home countries.

As a result of the rapidly increasing number of volunteers working in international development, it is indisputable that they will have some kind of impact on the local communities they are working in, and on their own values and outlooks. Furthermore, it is possible that these life-enhancing experiences will bring substantial benefits for their home countries. Volunteers have become a necessary and legitimate area for research. It is now more important than ever that we understand what they are doing and the impact they are having on the countries and communities they are working in.

1.2 Objectives

The goal of this research is to explore the experience of Western volunteers who have returned from work in Ghana. This research will analyse the volunteers' perceptions of their relationships

with the communities that hosted them and the role that they played in the community in the contexts of postcolonial theory. To understand the contemporary positioning of any low-income country, an understanding of their colonial history is necessary (Crush 1995). As Said (1995:49) argues, Westerners tend to be characterised as ‘rational, peaceful, liberal ... without natural suspicions’ and people from the ‘Third World’ as ‘irrational, degenerate, primitive, mystical, suspicious, sexually deprived etc’ (Ibid). Smith goes further, ‘It would be a mistake to conclude that...decolonisation marked the end of the empire. It did effectively signal an end to colonialism as a specific form of empire, but imperial interest and global reach continue to be present (1994:268)’. Today, this is played out through a number of different processes and interaction between agents from the West and the developing world. It is hoped that this research will go some way towards answering the question: What is the role of volunteers in the continuance of the neo-colonial phenomenon?

To explore the relationship between neo-colonialism and Western volunteers it is necessary to examine a number of different aspects of volunteer programmes. Therefore, the research will focus around three central themes, the relationship between volunteers and their host communities, motivations for engaging in volunteer work and the benefits gained by the volunteers and host communities.

The following research questions will be addressed in the dissertation:

- Why do Western people choose to travel to Ghana and work for little or no money?
- How do Western volunteers perceive their relationship with local communities?

- What impact does the experience have on the lives of the volunteers once they return home?
 - Does the experience affect their future career choices?
 - Do they engage in fundraising and/or awareness raising activities concerning international development?
 - How do they recall the experience as having affected their attitudes and ideas towards people in Ghana and perhaps other non-Westerners?

1.3 Locating the research: Why Ghana?

Western volunteers can be found throughout the developing world, in Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe and South America. It is clear that the economic, political, cultural and social conditions of the country that they are placed in will have a number of implications for the work they do and the extent to which they are accepted by the local community. For instance, if a volunteer is placed in an area with a high level of suspicion or even violence towards westerners, it will be necessary to gain the trust of the community.

It was my original intention to adopt a comparative approach to the research, investigating volunteers across the developing world with the aim of trying to come up with some broad generalizations. However, after further consideration it became apparent that this would be too wide a focus for the present study, making any generalisations problematic and unreliable. A more realistic way to conduct the research is to carry out an analysis of the experience of returned volunteers from a number of organisations in one country.

Ghana is a popular destination for many volunteers from a variety of different organizations and nationalities. Data on the precise number of volunteers and organizations who send them is not available. However, by examining their web sites it is clear that all the prominent British volunteer agencies (both long and short term), such as, Teaching Projects Abroad, VSO and BUNAC, along side the American Peace Corps and several Dutch organisations are currently operating in the country. This is in stark contrast to other West African countries, such as, Nigeria and Mali, which have a strong VSO and Peace Corps presence, but very few short-term volunteers.

Compared to many other West African countries, Ghana is politically stable, has relatively good communication links with the rest of the world and English is the official language (although most day-to-day communication is performed in local dialects). As a result, it is a desirable destination for both the volunteers and the agencies sending them.

Furthermore, as a ex British colony and the recipient of some of the first Western volunteers in the 1960's, the arguments concerning international volunteering and neo-colonialism are particularly relevant to the role Western volunteers play in Ghana's development. Combined, these factors make Ghana an ideal country to base a case study on Western volunteers working in developing countries.

1.4 Research Approach

This dissertation will comprise elements of theory and practice, and therefore, it requires the use of both primary and secondary research methods. As will be shown, there is a lack of data available on volunteers working in developing countries. A key finding in this respect is that Western volunteers in developing countries have not been the subjects of any substantial

academic or policy research in the past. The research that was available had generally been conducted from within the ‘volunteer sector’ rendering the results unreliable. Due to the lack of existing literature, it was decided that instead of providing an overview of the work of volunteers in Ghana it would be more useful to conduct interviews with ten returned volunteers regarding their experiences. As a result it has been possible to produce an ethnographic style analysis of the impact volunteers experiences had on their life choices and opinions as well as their perceived impact on their host communities.

The research has been approached from an interpretive perspective, this reflects the desire to not only gather data on the nature of international volunteering but understand the reasons behind growth of the phenomenon and the relationships between volunteers and host communities.

The research process will begin by conducting an in-depth study of the nature and implications of postcolonial theory and its implications for studying international volunteering. Second, a comprehensive literature review will also be carried out on the limited literature available on international volunteering, including promotional material and policy documents produced by organisations sending volunteers abroad. Finally, the primary research will examine the experiences of ten returned volunteers.

1.5 Chapter Overview

Chapter two aims to provide an introduction to post-colonial theory, which will be used as the theoretical framework for the remainder of the dissertation. The emphasis is on examining how the legacy of colonialism continues to play an important role in contemporary development agendas and in particular Western volunteer’s operating in developing countries. The chapter introduces key concepts of post-colonial theory and discusses their practical implications for

studying international development. The main texts in the post-colonial debate are introduced and particular importance has been attributed to Said's concept of Orientalism.

Chapter three introduces the phenomenon of international volunteering and places it within the wider historical context of international development. The aims of this chapter are threefold. First, to provide a comprehensive definition of international volunteering; second, to examine the history and development of the international volunteering phenomenon and its impact on the role played by contemporary volunteers, and finally, to analyse the benefits and pitfalls of volunteering for both the volunteers and the communities hosting them.

Chapter four presents the findings from the primary research, which examined the experiences of ten returned volunteers who had worked in Ghana. The analysis focuses on five areas: Practicalities [affecting the success of volunteer placements](#); volunteers' perceptions about their skill level and suitability for the job; [volunteers' perceptions of their personal and social relationship with the community](#); professional relationships between volunteers and local colleagues and what volunteers gained from the experience.

Chapter five aims to analyse the information collected, from both the primary research and the literature review. The purpose is to demonstrate how the post-colonial perspective can be a useful tool for identifying problems associated with international volunteering, which may not have been identified using a different approach. It is recognised that due to the limited resources available to conduct this research there are a number of limiting factors which have restricted the scope of the conclusions, these have also been outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 2: Post-Colonial Theory and the Legacy of Colonialism

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an introduction to post-colonial theory and to demonstrate how it can be used to inform research into developing countries. It is primarily concerned with outlining the way in which the colonial legacy has continued to effect ex-colonial states, such as, Ghana, and to provide a framework for postcolonial theory to be used to study the role of western volunteers in propagating western interests in Ghana. A secondary aim is to provide an overview of how general policy decisions in the West have impacted on ex-colonial states.

2.2 The Legacy of Colonialism

Imperial domination and expansion is an ancient phenomenon, beginning in Roman times and evident during all epochs since. However, from 1875-1900, an extraordinary movement of imperial enthusiasm and colonial expansionism set in amongst the European powers (Young 1931:83), commonly described as the scramble for Africa. ‘*With tremendous force the tides of alien conquest swirled over the continent*’ (Young 1931:89). By the beginning of the 20th Century, only Liberia and Ethiopia were spared from colonial domination.

It was clear that the primary objective of colonial rule was to increase the wealth and power of the colonising state. In 1912, the French liberal, Jules Hammond, stated that colonial expansion had cost the metropolis dearly in terms of money and human sacrifice. However, the potential long-term gain made it worthwhile; colonialism acted as a catalyst providing the necessary materials and conditions for the establishment of European capitalism (Loomba 2002:4).

The relationship between the former colonies and ex-colonial states continues to have major implications for modern global economic, political and social systems. Independence was seen as a new beginning for the ex-colonial states. However, as Kothari (2002) and Crush (1995) note, in reality the transition from the colonial moment to the development process signalled a shift in emphasis rather than the end of one project and the beginning of another (Kothari (2002:37). After the considerable effort involved with the establishment of the colonies and subsequent administration, the metropolis were unwilling to relinquish all control. The transition process was strictly governed by the departing colonial administration: As a result, a new bureaucratic state system was hurriedly constructed based on the Western model (Hoogvelt 2001:176). This system was doomed to failure before it even began, as the Western model of a nation state had developed slowly over hundreds of years and is highly integrated into the history of Europe. However, the ideologies behind liberal democracy had little foundation in the colonized regions' own histories (ibid). Said (1989:207) sums up the after effects of colonialism:

To have been colonized was a fate with lasting and grotesquely unfair results, especially after national independence had been achieved. Poverty dependency, underdevelopment, various pathologies of power and corruption, plus of course notable achievements in war, literacy, economic development: This mix of characteristics designated the colonized people who had freed themselves on one level but who remained victims of their past on another.

It is unrealistic to assume that political sovereignty and national independence brought an end to all forms of colonialism. The global reach of powerful Western states, international organisations and multinational corporations has resulted in a situation in which the West is

sustaining political and economic control over the rest of the world (Kothari 2002:37; Smith 1994:268). The new domination of developing countries by the West has been termed 'neo-colonialism' or 'recolonization'. Post-colonial theory is particularly useful for understanding and challenging this new form of domination and the euro-centric model of development currently directing development agendas. This approach sees development as an institution as part of the problem, it is considered a bureaucratic force with global reach and an explicitly pro capitalist agenda, operating as a tool of regimes that seek to perpetuate relations of inequality and dependence between the West and the rest, and through representation, to perpetuate the construction of others as post colonial subjects (Green, 2003:124).

2.3 Post-colonial Theory

Unlike other social theories, such as Marxism, post-colonial theory cannot be characterised as an ideology of specific set of ideas. Instead it is used as an umbrella term to refer to a '*diverse range of critical approaches that deconstruct Western thought*' (McClintock 1994). Furthermore, the term's formulation has not relied upon social science methodology and fieldwork, but instead, has emerged out of the field of humanitarian literature (Kapoor: 2002:650).

Bhabha writes that:

The term post-colonial is increasingly used to describe that form of social science criticism that bears witness to these unequal and uneven processes of representation by which the historical experience of the once colonized third world comes to be framed in the west (quoted in Mongia, 1996:1).

Edward Said's *Orientalism* is arguably the most important and influential book in the post-colonial genre. According to Said, 'Orientalism' is the '*systematic body of theory and practice that constitutes or represents the orient*' (1995:6). Said argues that there is a general continuity in the way the West and East are depicted:

On the one hand there are Westerners and on the other there are Arab-Orientals; the former are rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values, without natural suspicion; the latter are none of these things (1995:49)

In this sense, for Said, 'Orientalism' refers to the 'Western style for dominating restructuring and having authority over the Orient' (1995:3). He continues to describe the concept as:

The enormously systematic discipline by which European culture (has been) able to manage and even produce the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and even imaginatively during the post enlightenment period (ibid.)

The 'systematic discipline' referred to by Said illustrates the way in which the colonizers systematically penetrated all aspects of the native peoples lives, riddishing their cultures and religions and attempting to impose a new culture in which the native people were led to believe that they should serve their 'colonial masters'.

Bhabha (1994) emphasises the importance of these stereotypes for the continuation of oppression and as a result the coloniser constantly repeats them. This was perpetuated through a vast number of channels including trade, education, and literature. Novels such as Edward Foster's (1924) A Passage to India and Michel Madhusudan Dutt's Bengali epic Meyhnadvalh Kavya, go

along way to reinforce colonial stereotypes. Dutt embraced the Church of England's version of Christianity and turned traditionally sacred figures of Rama and Laksmana into weak-kneed, passive-aggressive, feminine villains and the demons Rovana and his son Meghnal into majestic, masculine heroes. Nandy (1983:22) describes Dutt's work as '*an attempt to explain the West in Indian terms and to incorporate it into Indian culture as an unavoidable experience*'.

It is essential that the colonised people are indoctrinated to believe that they are inferior to the colonisers. As Kapoor (2002:652) suggests, at times this involves imposing suppressed knowledge and propaganda to subvert any form of resistance. This has resulted in colonial discourse having a profound impact on colonial and ex colonial societies that it is impossible to recuperate any identity un-contaminated by it. If this discourse is to be taken seriously, it can be argued that it is not in the West's interest for the new state to develop to their level, and as Biccum (2002) argues, that the very nature of neo-liberal development policies undermines their ability to do so.

The goal of achieving the 'highest levels of humanity' as successfully attained in the West is, according to neo-liberal policies, only possible with the assistance of the West. However, according to the idea of supremacy used to subvert the new states, these goals should only be achievable by the West. Furthermore, the inferiority of developing countries is necessary for the West's self-construction as 'developed'. If it were possible for the achievements of Western countries to be spread across the globe the West would lose its primacy (2002:38).

This perspective brings into question the validity of much contemporary development policy. For example, the United Nations Millennium Development goals to fight against poverty, illiteracy, hunger, lack of education, gender inequality, infant and maternal mortality, disease and

environmental degradation. Although a commitment to fight against these problems has been welcomed by many campaigners, examining the motives in the wider contents reveals many contradictions in international policy. For example, the International Women's Movement questions the legitimacy of the goals as they are fundamentally contradicted by the essence of the free market economy encouraged by the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the national and international private sector (Obando, 2003).

2.4 Post-Colonial theory and Development agendas

The legacy of colonialism is clearly a vital and important component which is necessary to consider in the analysis of contemporary development policy in new states. However, as Sylvester notes '*... most of today's development work either makes no mention of the colonial period or makes no apology for it, indeed, such work never uses the word post-colonial either* (1999:717)'. Furthermore, the term 'Third World', commonly used to describe ex-colonies has strong neo-colonial connotation, propounding their inferiority and the supremacy of the 'first world nations'. There has been a tendency for the structural adjustment wing of mainstream development studies to attempt to fit the ex-colonies into models of Western political economy, ignoring the political, social, economic and cultural legacies of individual countries. This is known as the neo-liberal approach.

Post-colonial theory has articulated an alternative way of viewing development. It questions the legitimacy of much of the existing writing on the history of development and imperialist representations; it also fundamentally denies the argument that the influence of the colonial era is over, by highlighting the contemporary consequences. Post-colonial theory has become an important tool for commentators who adopted a critical approach to the role of the West in dictating the development agendas of 'third world' countries. It is essentially a post-structural

and cultural perspective, linking imperialism and agency to discourses and politics of representation (Kapoor 2002). This allows writers to comment critically on the role of the cultural aspects of imperialism in addition to the more structural economic and social aspects covered by dependency theory. Furthermore, post-colonial theory brings the whole concept of development into question arguing that the pre capitalist 'colonial states' are an indispensable and integral necessity for the existence of 'developed' capitalist states.

There is substantial evidence to suggest that it is not only big business and Western governments who continue to dominate policy in developing countries, but also Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) (Townsend 1999). Decisions on aid project funding are often made in the west, without proper consultation with and proper involvement of local people. NGDOs often have broader agendas; it is important that the development projects funded in the south produce the right message to attract funding in the North. For example, pictures of starving children provoke generous donations while less urgent long-term projects often find it harder to generate support. Projects designed in the West to generate maximum funding will not necessarily address the true local needs of the recipients, often with catastrophic results (Crewe and Harrison 1998:16).

Gina Porter, in her analysis of NGDOs working in Ghana, suggests that the pressure put on local field operatives can lead to a Western style of development not necessarily suited to the needs of the community. She states:

For some, [contact with Western staff] is an empowering process that may ultimately bring real benefits for the communities they serve. But for many, it would seem that overseas contact

encourages the transfer of Western codes and fashions, reinforcing western cultural imperialism. Confidence in local ideas... may be one of the casualties of these interactions (2003:139).

Furthermore, as Janet Townsend highlights, many NGOs based in the west may be uncharitably described as job creators for the middle class: *'However great the success of some NGOs, however real their expressed mission and values, job security for their staff has to be a lead concern and governs many actions'* (1999:614). It is clear that a substantial proportion of NGOs annual income ends up being used for administration purposes rather than development work. For example, in 2002/2003, 30 per cent of Christian Aid's income was used for campaigning administration and fundraising (Christian Aid 2003).

2.5 Using Post-colonial Theory to analyses volunteer experiences

The concern here is to establish a better understanding of the ways in which the legacy of colonialism finds expression within the work of Western volunteers working in Ghana. Therefore post-colonial theory is the obvious theoretical framework in which to structure the research. Although a Western construction, post-colonial theory recognises the differences between cultures, thus enabling the researcher to critically evaluate a phenomenon and take non-Western values into consideration. Furthermore, many non-western commentators have adopted the approach.

Volunteers may not necessarily have the same influence as permanent staff working for major NGOs but they certainly spend considerable amounts of time living, working and interacting with local people. Furthermore, they often undertake jobs for which they have little if any previous experience, such as teaching, but can wield considerable influence over the people they are working with. Regardless of good intentions and a desire to help less fortunate people,

Western volunteers are still heavily influenced by their education and general life experiences, making them excellent transmitters of Western cultural hegemony. Clearly, it is not possible to describe volunteer programmes as “job creation for the middle classes”, as the participants are unpaid. It may, however, be possible to suggest that many volunteers travel to developing countries and gain valuable skills and experience which potentially increasing their employability and earning power once they return to their home countries. Thus, essentially re-creating the imperial practice of exploiting the colonies for the benefit of the West.

The experiences of volunteers, their perception of how their host community views their role and the way they use new found experience once they return to their home countries can provide valuable information regarding the establishment and continuation of Western cultural hegemony in ex-colonial states. It is clear that both colonialism and volunteer placements articulate relationships between westerners and non-westerners and aim to establish or extend what has been defined in Western terms as ‘modernity’ or ‘progress’. A post-colonial analysis of the experiences and perceptions of volunteers can significantly contribute to our present understanding of relationships between Western workers in developing countries and the communities that they are working with.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the history of development since the end of the colonial era and shown how the legacy of colonialism continues to impact upon development agendas. It has also presented a summary of postcolonial theory which will provide the theoretical framework for the present research. Chapter 3 will now use this framework to examine the existing literature on international volunteering.

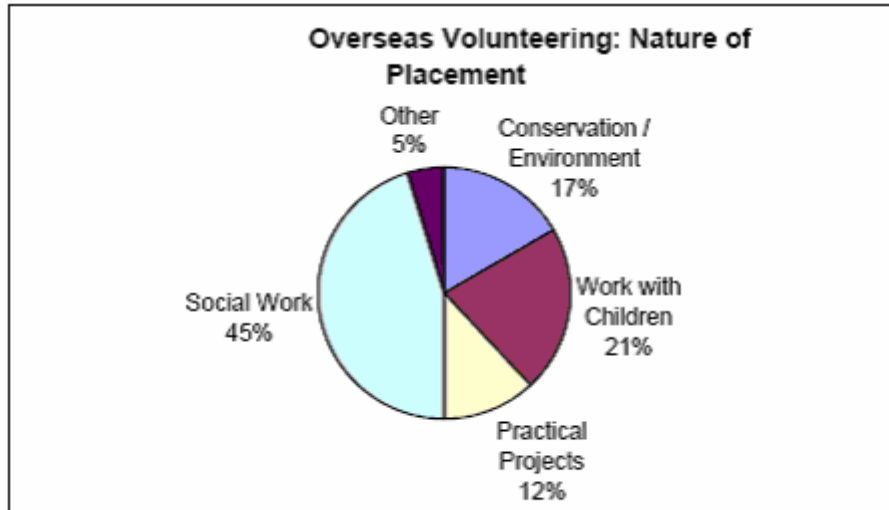
Chapter 3: Volunteering and the Wider Development Agenda

3.1 Introduction

International volunteering has developed as part of the wider development agenda and changing global power structures. The end of colonialism marked the beginning of a new type of relationship between the ex-colonies and western countries. However, as many commentators have suggested, this new relationship is still fundamentally unequal, with the West attempting to dominate the developing world culturally, politically, economically and socially (Said 1989, Kothari 2002, Crush 1995 and Smith 1994). These processes have been played out through a wide variety of agents, such as, structural adjustment programmes, tided loans, trade, and the work of Western NGOs. Volunteers are one agent among many.

Over the past fifty years, hundreds of thousands of volunteers have travelled from the West to the ex-colonies to work in a wide variety of sectors, from health care to business management. Due to a lack of data it is difficult to gauge precisely the number of volunteers working in each sector. However, Figure 3.1 produced by Andrew Jones in his review of Gap Year provision, clearly points to a large concentration in the education sector:

Figure: 1



(Teaching and education based volunteering are represented in the Social work category)

Jones (2004:79)

It is important to note that this graph only represents volunteers aged between 16 and 25 who are on a gap year programme.

The exact reasons for the concentration in the education sector are unknown. However, as outlined below (section 3.5), it is clear, that since the beginning of the volunteering phenomenon in the 1950s volunteers have worked in the education sector and there is still a shortage of qualified teachers in developing countries.

The aim of this chapter is threefold. First, to produce a comprehensive definition of international volunteering, second, to examine the history and development of the international volunteering phenomenon and its impact on the role played by contemporary volunteers, and finally, to analyse the benefits and pitfalls of volunteering for both the volunteers and the communities hosting them.

3.2 What is Volunteering?

Defining precisely what is encompassed by a voluntary act is problematic. According to the dictionary definition, it is an act that is performed out of free will and without payment (Oxford Dictionary of English 1998). However, in terms of defining contemporary volunteer practices this definition is not very helpful, as it vastly simplifies the phenomenon. For instance, there are situations requiring volunteer work which any rational person is unlikely to be able to refuse, such as, community service instead of a prison sentence or military service; volunteer work to enable students to gain credit for their studies or to gain the necessary experience to gain a job (Dekker and Halman 2003:2). Volunteering is not always conducted exclusively out of free will, sometimes it is expected or a necessary activity. As Stebbins (1996) argues, the transition from volunteering as a 'serious leisure' pursuit to voluntary activities in the occupation setting is a smooth one, and it is often difficult to draw a line. For example, a teacher may not be formally required to run after school clubs, but volunteering to do so may still be expected.

The definition of voluntary work as being unpaid is also problematic; it is only a small step between being reimbursed for indisputable expenses and the acceptance of payment below the market value (Dekker and Halman 2003:2). For instance Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and Peace Corps volunteers are routinely paid a small wage and given a lump sum for training etc on completion of their project (Brown, 1999). A more realistic definition of voluntary work (and the one which is used by the present research) is work being undertaken not primarily for financial gain. But this said, it is clear that volunteers often gain in many other ways. Thomas (2001:21) argues, that "All volunteers have a greater goal in mind, be it a morally driven objective, a sense of personal achievement or a strategic career plan".

3.3 Categorising International Volunteers

Volunteer work requires a varying level of commitment. At one extreme it could encompass helping out for a few hours a week in a charity shop. At the other immersing oneself in to a far off community and working full time for several years. Thomas makes a useful distinction between the level of commitment required by domestic and international volunteers:

“The domestic volunteer will fit voluntary work – such as tutoring disadvantaged children or chairing a round table group – around other real-life commitments. International volunteers, on the other hand, make a total commitment to another culture for a specific term, so that their contribution is not a solitary act or a voluntary donation of time, but rather a distinct period in that individual’s life.”

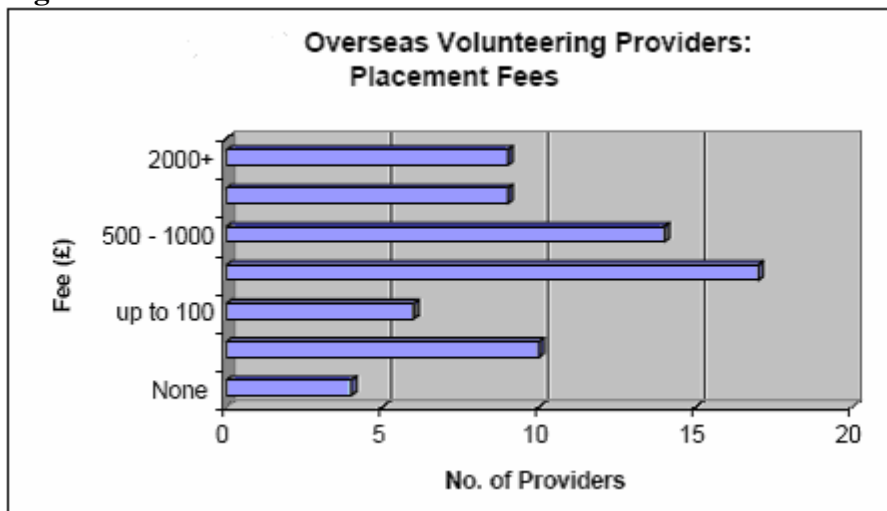
(Thomas 2001:22)

International volunteers cannot all be grouped together; a clear distinction must be drawn between long-term ‘professional’ volunteers and short-term ‘gap year’ volunteers. There are essentially three areas in which distinctions can be made: First, length of placement. Long-term professional volunteers usually volunteer for a minimum of 12 months, the usual length of a placement is approximately two years (this is the recommended placement time for both VSO and Peace Corps). While the Gap year volunteers placements usually last between three and six months and very rarely last more than twelve.

Second, long-term volunteers often receive some form of allowance for their work, usually the same wage a local person would receive employed in a similar role. On the other hand, the gap year volunteers receive no payment and usually pay for the privilege of volunteering. The cost of gap year programmes once again brings in to question whether individuals on such

programmes can really be defined as volunteers. According to the definition of volunteering outlined above (Section 3.2), it is an activity engaged in not primarily for financial gain, however, the nature of many gap year projects is that they are undertaken for substantial financial loss. Figure 3.2 indicates that many of the provider organisations charge participants upwards of one thousand pounds for the privilege of “volunteering”.

Figure: 1.2



(Jones 2004:80)

Third, qualifications and experience, Professional volunteers are usually well qualified in the field they are working in and have substantial professional experience, while gap year volunteers rarely have any professional experience or qualifications. This can be illustrated by comparing the necessary qualifications and experience required for VSO volunteers and Teaching Projects Abroad volunteers to teach English. According to the VSO web site to teach English as a foreign language volunteers must have a “*BA degree plus a teaching qualification (CELTA, Trinity TESOL, DELTA, or PGCE in English or Modern Languages) plus one year’s teaching experience*”. While the Teaching Projects Aboard web site states volunteers need “*need A-Level, high schools diploma, matriculation, baccalaureate or equivalent, along with reasonable*

spoken English. No TEFL or teaching qualifications are needed for our teaching programmes (although you are welcome if you do happen to have them)."

These distinctions demonstrate that there is a huge range in skill levels amongst volunteers working in developing countries and raises a number of ethical questions regarding volunteers, particularly those on short-term gap year projects. If a young person has been educated in the West to A-level standard does this give them the right or indeed the necessary skills to go and teach English in a developing country? It could be argued that here we are bearing witness to a neo-colonial phenomenon, where young westerners are seen to be racially and culturally superior to people in developing countries, and are therefore considered to be suitable teachers regardless of experience or qualifications. To understand this further it is necessary to examine the history of Western volunteers working in developing countries, and how they fit in to more general development agendas.

3.4 Volunteers and the Era of Development

The end of the Second World War marked the beginning of a new way of thinking about the colonies. In 1945 the British government was stretched to breaking point and was struggling to maintain the colonial administration. They were also under considerable pressure from the US to start dismantling the empire to open up new markets to US capitalist penetration. By the mid 1960 the majority of the colonies had been given their independence bring to an end the doctrine of colonial domination and launching a new 'era of development'. According to Sachs, writing in 1992 about the proceeding 40 years:

Like a towering lighthouse guiding sailors towards the coast, 'development' stood as the idea which oriented emerging nations in their journey through post-war history. No matter whether

democracies or dictatorships, the countries of the South proclaimed development as their primary aspiration, after they had been freed from colonial domination.

(Sachs 1992:1)

Commentators such as Sachs (1992), Esteva (1992) and Escobar (1995) have traced the beginning of this era to 20th January 1949 when Harry Truman declared in his inaugural speech that:

We must embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas.

The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profit – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a programme of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing.

(Truman, 1949, quoted in Esteva, 1992, p6).

In addition to the beginning of the ‘era of development’ the post war period saw a new wave of international co-operation and re-alignment of global power structures. The establishment of the Bretton Woods institutions in 1944 meant that international bodies regulated the financial economic and political systems of nations states and the US took over the role of dominant global power from Britain.

As a result there was an explosive growth in the presence of Western as well as local NGOs in developing countries. These organisations form a major part of the ‘development machine’, a vast institutional and disciplinary nexus of official agencies and practitioners, consultants,

scholars and other miscellaneous bodies producing and consuming knowledge about the developing world (Manji and O’Coill 2002:568).

This new emphasis on ‘development’ and international co-operation provided the backdrop in which the first volunteer agencies were formed. It has been suggested that the world University Service Assembly in India in 1950, where “a young Indonesian proposed that young skilled people from the West would be of value in the development of his country, if they were interested in living and working with Indonesians on an equal basis (Bird, 1998:14). This was an key historical starting point (Howes, A 2001:14). Australia was one of the first countries to respond in 1954. This was followed by the formation of the British organisation VSO in 1958, (although VSO’s history can unofficially be traced back to helping Hungarian refugees during the aftermath of World War Two); and the American Peace Corps in 1961.

3.5 The Formation of VSO and Peace Corps.

The formation of the first volunteer agencies was not motivated solely by a desire “to help in the world wide assault against poverty, hunger, ignorance and disease” as stated by Shriver (1961, the first director of Peace Corps). But, certainly the Peace Corps, and to a lesser extent VSO stimulated by the concern that Communist ideas were being spread through the newly independent colonies. There is also some evidence to suggest that there was considerable rivalry between the two organisations to establish them selves as high profile ‘development organisations’. This was a reflection of the rivalry between Britain and America to establish a strong position in the post colonial era.

Writing about the motivation for the establishment of the Peace Corps Julius Amin writes:

By establishing the agency under the mutual Security Act, Kennedy made it part of American Cold War policies ... It was hoped that the Peace Corps would help developing nations modernize, thereby preventing communists advances towards them. Also, the presence of volunteers would show people in the developing world of America's altruism, and in return the people would reject communism.

(Amin 1999:5)

Similarly Alec Dickson (founder of VSO) used cold war mentality to aid his quest to receive funding from the British Government. He persuaded the Colonial Office that communist countries were much more adept at making friends through overseas youth work than the west. Furthermore, he also played on the English pride, in a letter to the government in 1960 (on the eve of the establishment of the American Peace Corps) he wrote:

Available for immediate service now is a boy from Eton with four 'S' levels in Science and an Open Scholarship at a Cambridge College: a superb musician and a plucky games player – the grandson of [a well-known post war cabinet minister]. To suppose that he is not good enough to teach at some secondary school in East Africa for a year - whereas some youth who has taken a heavens-knows what degree at some University in the States is regarded as superior – seems madness.

(Quoted in Bird, 1998:38)

This technique clearly paid off. In 1960 VSO finally secured substantial Government funding. This funding has been sustained. In 2003 over two thirds of VSO's funding came from the Department for International Development (Report and Financial Statements, Year ended 31st March 2003). It is clear that the American Peace Corps operates as a government department

and as a result its policy and practice is dictated by the US administration. Although VSO is an independent organisation, with such a large proportion of its funding coming direct from government it would be naive to suggest that the British Government does not wield any influence over VSO.

3.6 The Birth of the Gap Year Phenomenon

During the 1960s and 1970s the options available for international travel and volunteering for school leavers and professionals were limited to independent travel, with no support from any organisation. By the late 60's, VSO was only open to graduates or those with a specific skill. However, the last 25 years has seen a revolution in youth travel and international volunteering. An entire industry has been established offering young people the opportunity to experience an overseas adventure, develop numerous life skills and 'help' people in less developed countries. The Gap Year industry is an extremely lucrative business. It has been estimated that in the 2003/2004 academic year at least 50,000 young people opted to take a gap year (Curtis, P 2003). Although it is clear that not all of these people went abroad to engage in 'volunteer' work or 'adventure' travel, it is clear that many will have done.

The industry comprises of both non-for profit organisations such as Raleigh International and Student Partnership World Wide and commercial organisations such as BUNAC and Teaching Projects Abroad. It is clear that the primary aim of the commercial organisation is to make money. However, as with VSO and Peace corps there is considerable concern surrounding the true motivations for sending young people abroad and extensive debate regarding what they will achieve. Raleigh International can be used as a useful case study:

According to their Web site:

Raleigh International is a youth development charity which inspires people from all backgrounds and nationalities to discover their full potential by working together on challenging environmental and community projects around the world.

The organisation was established by Prince Charles in 1978 and run by Colonel Blashford-Snell on strict military lines and was shamelessly adventure-oriented. The above quote from Raleigh international's web site demonstrates that today there is a much greater emphasis on the community work the participants engage in.

Like VSO, Raleigh is technically registered as an independent organisation. However, much of its funding comes from the government and it has strong links with the British army who fund 20 places a year for disadvantaged young people in return for helping the army raise awareness of its career opportunities among Raleigh participants. This severely undermines its position as an organisation independent of the government. In an article for the Guardian newspaper, John Vidal states:

[Raleigh international has become a]... youth wing of the diplomatic corps and a recruiting ground for the British army... It tends to take its expeditions to countries which Britain likes to do lucrative arms business with, many of which have or have known dictatorships. In the past few years, it has been to Indonesia, Oman, Brunei, Namibia, and Angola.

(Vidal 2001)

This further demonstrates the neo-colonial nature of much volunteer work. Volunteers are essentially being used to promote Western interests in developing countries. In addition it seems

that many of the participants in volunteer programmes are taken in by colourful advertising materials and convinced that they are embarking on valuable aid work, without fully understanding the underlying motivations of such organisations.

In relation to this point, Simpson (2003) argues that the Gap Year industry tends to 'evoke a highly simplistic conceptualisation of development' in its marketing and publicity material. Organisations widely refer to the 'usefulness' of volunteers and how they are needed by the communities or environments in which they work. Simpson questions this approach in that whilst volunteers abroad clearly produce some valuable contributions, there are also high risks. These risks centre around the appropriateness of the activities undertaken in relation to improving host communities' lives, the diversion of development participation from local to non-locals and the relative cost-benefit issues around using high-cost volunteers from overseas as opposed to local people. Organisations tend to market themselves to young people as offering an opportunity to making major contributions to needy communities or environments, whereas the literature elsewhere casts doubts on the overall significance of the activities of these individuals especially when they have little on-the-ground support overseas. Furthermore, within development theory, there has been a significant critique of NGOs and charities' role in wider development (Fennell 1999; Nederveen-Pieterse 2000) suggesting that Westerners are less important to achieving development than grassroots community activity.

3.7 Who Benefits from International Volunteering?

The process of volunteering in a developing country involves three separate parties, all of which have different agendas, the organisation sending the volunteers, the volunteer and the recipient community. In the previous two sections, 3.5 The Formation of VSO and Peace Corps and 3.6 The Birth of the Gap Year Phenomenon, I have explored some of the hidden motivations of the

volunteer organisations such as fighting the spread of communism and making money. To fully understand phenomenon of international volunteering it is of vital importance to explore both what volunteers and host communities can get out of the experience.

3.7.1 The Volunteer

An examination of the information provided by a number of volunteer agencies on their websites demonstrates that there is a clear emphasis on what the volunteers can gain from taking part in one of these programmes. For instance, Teaching Projects Abroad state:

The programme is an excellent opportunity to combine adventurous foreign travel with a worthwhile job. As well as gaining experience that looks brilliant on your CV or résumé, you will improve your transferable skills such as team working, presentation and communication. Above all, this is an unrivalled opportunity to gain an insight into a completely different culture and way of life.

(Teaching Projects Abroad 2003).

This description clearly emphasises the opportunities to gain valuable skills that may enhance their employability once they return to their home communities. Furthermore, it is worth noting that nowhere on their websites do Teaching Projects Abroad give any detail of what volunteers may be able to contribute to the communities apart from reassuring that the prospective volunteer that they will be doing a ‘worthwhile job’.

In contrast VSO’s website constantly reinforces their desire to ‘fight global poverty and disadvantage’ through their volunteer programmes. However, they also emphasise the advantages of volunteering for career development:

Volunteer work is often looked upon as 'time out' of your career. However, the professional nature of the jobs that we offer means that VSO is a career choice. We take your professional development seriously. Before you go overseas, you'll work with a VSO trainer to address any additional training needs. Your overseas employer will provide you with professional support and guidance, complemented by conferences, workshops and distance learning. On your return, you'll receive fortnightly listings of jobs in development and the public sector. We also offer you access to careers advice days or one-to-one consultations with trained advisors.

(Voluntary services Overseas 2003)

It is clear from Dick Bird's book Never the Same Again: A History of VSO and material produced by other volunteer organisations that it was never the intention to send volunteers abroad so they could offer their skills and services without receiving any benefit themselves. However, what is questionable is the state of the balance between providing a useful service to the community and the volunteers' own personal development.

From a postcolonial perspective, it could be perceived that volunteer agencies are using developing countries to train personnel to work more efficiently once they return home. In the contemporary Western employment market, higher order skills such as intercultural communication, leadership, team working, intuition, innovation, creativity, problem solving, self-assurance and adaptability, are becoming just as important as academic qualifications. It is clear that overseas volunteer work is an excellent way for people at the beginning of their careers and those seeking promotion to develop higher order skills (Thomas 2001:16).

Furthermore, if an individual is paying a considerable amount of money to go on a project it is reasonable to suggest that they expect some kind of return for their investment. In the same way, a student attending university and paying tuition fees expects a certain qualification when they graduate, gap year volunteers may expect to develop a variety of new skills and experience while partaking in a project.

3.7.2 The Host Community

The research into the impact of volunteering on host communities is extremely limited and focuses on the value that overseas volunteering work adds to the wider development objectives (e.g. MacMichael 1996; Mowforth and Munt 1998; Butcher 2003). The overwhelming conclusion is that volunteering may not significantly contribute to the long-term development of host communities, but at the same time it makes a limited positive contribution (Jones 2004:55). To date there has not been a comprehensive study into possible negative side effects of Western volunteers working in developing countries.

It would be unfair to suggest that people only engage in overseas voluntary work for their own personal development. A poll in 1999 showed that twenty five per-cent of UK graduates express a desire to contribute to society (Moser Report 1999), but what has to be recognised is that there may be differences about volunteers' ideas about what they hope to achieve and what the host community expects of them. Sarah Pink in her article, The White Helpers: Anthropologists, development workers and local imaginations, reminds us that *'it is important to situate our understanding of helping ... in terms of local peoples' understandings of the roles that rich foreigners play in local culture and society'* (1998:9).

It is also necessary to consider the reason why people in developing countries are often so eager to welcome Western volunteers into their communities. Porter (2003:137) suggests that *'many Ghanaians stress the importance in their culture of the need to welcome strangers, to be polite and to avoid confrontation.'*

Pink also propounds:

Local people engage in... processes of evaluating 'us' and using 'us' as case studies for their own warehouses of examples and generalization about white people and how we can be used to advance their careers.

(Pink, 1998:11)

For instance, Western teachers may go and work in Ghana with the intention of helping young people achieve a good standard of education. However, for individuals within the community in which they are working, their primary concern may be how to manipulate the teacher so they receive a share of their belongings when they leave. Furthermore, having a white person in your community is often regarded as an important status symbol, which many traditional leaders aspire to (Pink, 1998:12).

3.8 Summary

Chapter 3 has explored the different types of volunteers and organisations operating in developing countries and examined the existing literature dealing with the relationships between volunteers and host communities. This has provided the necessary information to produce a working definition of international volunteering and exposed both the benefits and problems associated with sending Westerners to volunteer in developing countries. Chapter 4 will continue

on from this by outlining the details of the primary research conducted for this study and presenting the results within the context of the existing literature outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Volunteer Experiences

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine the experience of 10 returned volunteers who have engaged in some form of voluntary work in Ghana.

It is not the intention of the research to homogenise volunteers; it is clear that there have been major changes to the work undertaken by volunteers over the past fifty years and each individual has a unique and personal experience. Similarly, volunteer agencies have developed and evolved and all have their own ways of operating and agendas. However, from examining the experience of a small number of volunteers it is possible to gain some insight into the nature and impact of international volunteering in Ghana, and on the life choices and perceptions of returned volunteers.

The analysis can be broken down in to five sections:

- Practicalities affecting the success of volunteer placements;
- Volunteer's perceptions about their skill level and suitability for the job;
- Volunteers perceptions of their personal and social relationship with the Community;
- Professional relationships between volunteers and permanent staff;
- The effect of the experience on the volunteers life once they return to their home country, in terms of practical skills they have been able to develop, attitudes towards people in developing countries and future life choices.

4.2 Methodology

To comply with the requirements of interpretive approach (outlined in chapter 1) and more importantly to formulate a true understanding of the relationships between volunteers and host communities, it is essential for the data to be collected using qualitative methods. Therefore, I conducted semi-structured interviews with ten returned volunteers. The following table outlines details about the volunteers interviewed:

Table 1 Returned volunteers interviewed

Respondent	Organisation	Length of placement	Date of placement	Age when volunteering	Median of interview	Date of Interview
Respondent 1	VSO	2.5 years	2000-2003	24-27	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 2	BUNAC	4 months	2002-2003	20-21	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 3	BUNAC	6 months	2002-2003	22	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 4	Quaker Overseas Volunteers	1 year	1966-1967	18-19	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 5	VSO	2 years	2002-2003	23-25	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 6	BUNAC	4 months	2002-2003	22-23	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 7	VSO	2 years	2002-2004	23-25	Face to face	Jul-04
Respondent 8	VSO	2 years	2001-2003	22-24	MSN Messenger	Jul-04
Respondent 9	VSO	2.5 years	2000-2003	23-25	MSN Messenger	Jul-04
Respondent 10	BUNAC	4 months	2002-2003	21-22	Face to face	Jul-04

4.3 Interview Design

To gain an accurate and in depth understanding of the relationship between volunteers and local communities, it is clear that a combination of in-depth interviews and participant observation would produce the most valid data. However, for the purpose of this dissertation there is neither the time or money available to conduct such detailed research. Nevertheless, as Bogdan (1984:80) propounds: '*Participant observation requires a commitment of time and effort that is not always warranted by the additional understanding gained*'. Therefore, it was decided that

semi-structured interviews be the most feasible method of collecting data. Furthermore, they allowed me to gain an insight into a wide variety of volunteer placements and experiences.

The purpose of the interviews was to gain a general insight into the volunteer's perception of their experience and to attempt to understand the nature of the relationship between the volunteer and the community they were placed in. Therefore, it was vital that the interviewees had plenty of opportunity to express themselves and to discuss issues of importance to them (a copy of the interview guide can be seen in Appendix 1). Furthermore, my previous knowledge about the specific volunteer projects the interviewees had been engaged in differed, thus, it was important for me to be able to depart from the interview guide, and pick up on points which they made and investigate them in greater depth.

This is highlighted by Stephen Cole when commenting upon a study by Lee Rainwater about Black subculture, he notes that: *'In a quantitative survey the respondents would probably give answers that reflected their ideal values of family life rather than their real values and behaviour'* (Cole, 1976:207 in Jackson 1999:130). The more flexible approach allowed by semi-structured interviewing contributes significantly to the validity of the research, as areas of significance are not dictated solely by the researcher but derived from the perceptions of the interviewee. Furthermore, the flexibility of the interview structure allows the interviewer to adapt the questioning making them relevant for the individual interviewees in response to the discovery of unexpected topics that warrant additional attention (Jackson 1999:131).

Due to the lack of time and resources, the drawing of a random sample in order to ensure an accurate statistical representation of all western volunteers who have worked in Ghana is impossible. For these reasons it was concluded that the only practical way to trace suitable

respondents would be through the use of a snowball sample. Another limiting factor in the sampling was the geographical spread of some of the volunteers and a lack of resources to travel extensively to interview people. As a result, eight out of the ten respondents were currently living in either London, Manchester or Leeds. The remaining two lived in Edinburgh, and these interviews were conducted using an internet messenger as it was impractical meet for a face to face interview.

4.4 Results

4.4.1 Practicalities Affecting the Success of Volunteer Placements

The way a volunteer's placement is organised can have a dramatic effect on its success. For instance, the length of the placement, the job they are doing, their suitability for the job and the amount of support and training from the agencies, are all factors which could potentially determine whether a volunteer enjoys a productive and valuable placement or whether they become disillusioned with their ability to make a difference.

Volunteers on two-year placements are clearly going to have more opportunity to have an impact on the community that they are working in than those on shorter placements. One of the VSO volunteers (respondent 7) interviewed, clearly stated that the first year of his placement was all about *'leaning how things worked'* and *'teaching what I was told'* while during the second year *'I had built up enough knowledge and confidence to start organising meetings and suggesting improvements to the organisation and teaching practices adopted by the school'*. The same volunteer also commented that previous to volunteering with VSO he had taught in a school in Mozambique for six months and had not felt that he had been able to make a lasting impression on the school because just when he had started to understand how things worked it was time to leave.

Several of the volunteers on short placements responded to the question: *‘Do you think you were able to give as much to the community as you gained from the experience?’* by saying that they thought they may have been able to make a bigger impact and give back more to the community if they had been on there for a longer period. Although the same volunteers also suggested that they did not feel they were ready to commit to demanding work in a developing country for a long period of time.

One of the most striking distinctions between the VSO volunteers interviewed and those from other agencies was the level of orientation and support they received. BUNAC volunteers orientation consisted of an afternoon in London and three days in Ghana learning about Ghanaian culture and lifestyles. Conversely, the VSO volunteers were enrolled in two weekend courses, *‘Preparing for Change’* - about preparing yourself for living in a developing country and leaving friends and family behind and *‘Volunteers and Development’* which looks at the role of volunteers in a wider development context. The teaching volunteers also took a one-week intensive course on teaching in a developing country. All of the VSO volunteers commented, that the orientation and training was really helpful, while many of the BUNAC volunteers commented that their orientation was helpful but far too short and very disorganised. However, respondent 3 did note that the disorganisation of the orientation was in itself a useful introduction to Ghanaian life!

Considering the importance of *‘practical factors’* on the success of placements, it was surprising how little thought and research volunteers did into the organisations sending them and the nature of the placements. All but one of those interviewed, said they had chosen to go with a particular organisation either because they had seen an appealing advert or had been recommended by a

careers adviser, and had not looked into other programmes. Furthermore, none of the volunteers had done any research into the organisations' ethics policies.

4.4.2 Volunteers' Perceptions about their Skill Level and Suitability for the Job

Although none of the volunteers I interviewed had previously worked as a teacher in the UK before volunteering in Ghana, some had taken TEFL courses and worked as classroom assistants. This experience gave the volunteers more confidence at the beginning of the placement, but as time went on it appeared that the difference between teaching in the UK and Ghana was so great that formal teaching qualifications were not considered that useful. Respondent 6, who since returning to the UK has trained as a primary school teacher, commented that even if she had been a qualified teacher before she went *'things are so different there, like teaching methods, maybe I would have been more prepared but I still think the Ghanaian teachers would have been better'*.

Amongst the secondary school teachers, it was clear that a solid understanding of their subjects was more important. Furthermore, as respondent 5 stated, *'in Ghana if you have a degree you are qualified to teach.'* This was a sentiment that was coined by the three VSO science and maths teachers interviewed (VSO does not require science graduates to have any formal teaching qualification, unlike teachers of other subjects).

There was a general consensus amongst the majority of the volunteers that they did not feel adequately prepared before they started their placements. The main problem seemed related to culture shock, and it was argued no amount of preparation and planning back in the UK could have prepared them for the conditions they were working in and the cultural differences they experienced. However, once again, the responses suggested that this was less of a problem for

the VSO volunteers because of the length of their placements, even if they had difficulties at the beginning they were able to correct any mistakes later on. Respondent 1 answered the question ‘Do you think you were adequately qualified and prepared for the job before you started?’ by saying: *Professionally, not really, but I was fine after some time on the job, as were most people I was in country with, so I guess the training must have been adequate.*

It was interesting to note that the vast majority of interviewees were full of confidence about what they would be able to achieve before they went. Once they arrived at their placements they went through three stages; at the beginning, sheer panic about what they would be able to achieve, in the middle, slowly coming to terms with the situation, and towards the end, a more realistic idea of what they could achieve.

The interviews also demonstrated that the VSO volunteers had taken their work and role in the community much more seriously. For instance, the BUNAC volunteer teachers considered themselves to be very much ‘*volunteers helping out*’ while the VSO teachers saw themselves as full teachers which had the same level of (if not more) responsibility for the quality of their students’ education. This differing attitude may have been related to the fact that short term volunteers seemed to be used as supply teachers, covering classes when the full time teachers were unavailable, while the VSO teachers generally had their own classes which they often had to get through important exams.

4.4.3 Volunteers Perceptions of their Personal and Social Relationship with the Community

Historically, Ghana has had a turbulent relationship with the West and the colonial legacy still plays an important role in everyday life. Respondent 1 commented that she was surprised at how often the subject of colonialism came up in every day conversation and another said he found it

quite disturbing that Ghanaians often jokingly referred to him as their colonial master. Colonial history has to be considered when commenting on relationships between Westerners and Ghanaians. This was highlighted by a comment made by respondent 4 who had been teaching in Ghana in 1966, only nine years after Ghana gained its independence. She suggested that the local people did not distinguish between volunteers and people who had worked for colonial administration, starting, *'we were all seen as ex-pats'*.

All the volunteers reported having had a positive relationship with the community and commented on the friendliness and welcoming nature of the Ghanaian people. Although respondent 8 said that the first few weeks he was there people were quite suspicious of him as the previous volunteers had left on bad terms and had gained a reputation for drinking too much. The volunteers all noted that the Ghanaians were very interested in them and always wanted to know what they were doing. Respondent 1 illustrated this point by telling me a story about her rucksack:

...after about two years my backpack had started to fall apart and the headmaster said to me you know the market women are talking that the volunteer has not got enough money to fix her bag. That gave me quite an insight in to how much attention people were playing to what I was doing.

There were numerous other stories about volunteers constantly being the centre of attention and having their rubbish sorted through by villagers.

There was a general consensus amongst the interviewees that overall the communities had benefited from their presence. The professional volunteers focussed primarily on their achievements at work, for example, the three science and maths teachers all stated that their

particular students would not have had a science teachers if they had not been there. Although the short-term volunteers were not as positive about their achievements, they pointed out that their presence in the community had brought in desperately needed extra money, by giving people the opportunity to let out rooms in their houses and given the communities a chance to learn about Western people.

All the volunteers noted that towards the end of their stay in the village the reaction of their community changed. In all cases the interviewees felt that in general the local community were sad to see them go, put on huge leaving ceremonies and gave them gifts. Respondent 6 commented that she was unsure if it was me they were sad to see go or the money I paid in rent! There was a general consensus that local people became even more friendly and interested in what the volunteers were doing and often asked for contact details and whether they could have various belongings once they had left.

4.4.4 Professional Relationships with Colleagues

The interviewees were all engaged in projects that required them to work closely with Ghanaians and fit in with what was already going on rather than attempting to establish new initiatives. A number of volunteers commented that they felt this was the only way volunteer projects could succeed as it made their Ghanaian hosts feel like they were teaching the volunteers new things as well as learning from them. The VSO teachers all agreed that the best way to try and influence school policies and practices was by example. Respondent 9 said that:

Along with a Peace Corps volunteer who I was working alongside, we were able to persuade the teachers that they should not beat the pupils and that boys as well as girls should be made to clean the school and fetch water.

However, they were unsure whether such changes would last after they left. It was clear that the VSO teachers had been encouraged during their training to absorb themselves in to the working of the school. All of the long-term volunteers said that they had regular meetings with other members of staff to discuss ideas and the curriculum. Respondent 1 also said she regularly observed one of the Ghanaian teachers and allowed her to do the same then the two of them would get together and discuss each others' performance.

New employees in any organisation whether, in England or Ghana require a substantial period of time to settle in and orientate themselves. During this time, substantial assistance is often required from existing employees, taking them away from their normal tasks. Several of the short term volunteers indicated that when they first arrived at their placements there did not seem to be anything to do, they often had to keep asking what they should do and persuade people to show them around.

It is clear that if a school receives, a new teacher who they know will stay for the next two years it is worth their while to invest a considerable amount of time inducting them. However, if they are only going to be with them for a couple of months and don't have any teaching qualifications or experience, it may well not be considered a constructive use of time. As respondent 2, one of the short-term volunteers, commented *'the teachers did not seem that bothered about the experience we gained'*.

Four out of the ten volunteers interviewed told me that when they had first arrived at their placement there was already at least one volunteer working in the community and they had a handover period which lasted between two and six weeks. This gave them the opportunity to

learn about the community and various people in it from someone else who had experienced it as an outsider. There was a consensus that this gave them a head start in integrating themselves in to the community and was a vital source of information. Furthermore, three out of the four who had had a hand over period also stayed on to help their replacements settle in. They all agreed that this made leaving the community easier, as they felt more confident that their work would be continued once they left and did not feel so guilty about leaving.

4.4.5 What do Volunteers Gain from the Experience?

It is clear that volunteering in Ghana is not always easy and straightforward. Interacting with people from a different culture and working under often very difficult conditions, with little or no communication with the outside world can be an extremely stressful experience. However, every volunteer interviewed agreed that they had benefited tremendously from the experience and had gained a lot more from it than they were able to give to their host community. When asked if she had benefited from the experience, respondent 1 said:

Massively and completely. It is not anything you could get from travelling or living in the UK and reading about it, you just get to know some much.... I have just started a development MA and reading stuff there is so much I can relate to which I would not have been able to do if I had not been too Ghana. I gained loads from living and working somewhere different it was a really amazing experience.

There was a general consensus that volunteering in Ghana had been the most exciting, life enhancing and beneficial experience they had ever had.

The main skills, all the volunteers agreed that they had developed, were confidence and communication skills, two of the key higher order skills that are highly regarded by employers and universities. Five of the interviewees noted that before going to Ghana they found situations like starting a new job or meeting new people quite a nerve racking experience. However, after having to integrate themselves in to a Ghanaian community and work with people from a completely different culture, they were more confident to face new challenges back in the UK. As nine of the ten volunteers interviewed had worked as teachers, it was not surprising that they all commented on the teaching skills they had developed. Even though only one of the volunteer teachers continued to teach once they returned to the UK, they had all developed their communications skills and felt much more comfortable presenting information to large groups of people and answering difficult questions.

All the volunteers interviewed stated that volunteering had made them think and in many cases re-think there career plans. The eight volunteers who had decided not to continue teaching once they returned home said, it had made them realise that teaching was not for them. Several of the volunteers commented that seeing the domination of large multi-national companies, such as, Nestle, and the impact that they were having on small farmers had made them realise that they did not want to work for a multi-national companies unless they were sure that their actions were not having a negative impact on developing countries. Two of the volunteers interviewed said that it had been a turning point in their career as they are now working for the organisations that sent them out to Ghana.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has provided an insight in to the experience of 10 English people who have spent time volunteering in Ghana. It outlines the nature of their relationship with their host

communities, their perceptions of how effective their placements were and what they gained from the experience. Although it is not possible to make generalisations from such a small sample the highly valid data can now be used, in conjunction with the secondary data, to produce an analysis of Western volunteers operating in Ghana and their role in continuing the colonial legacy. Furthermore, from the analysis of these volunteers experience and existing literature on international volunteering it will be possible to make some limited recommendations on how volunteer placements could be improved to maximise the benefits for both volunteers and host communities.

Chapter 5: Analysis and Limitations

5.1 Introduction

The research has produced a picture of international volunteering as politically motivated, of limited benefit to the host communities and of high value to those Westerners working as volunteers. As a result it would be easy to conclude that international volunteering is a prime example of neo-colonialism. Instead of exploiting natural resources and human labour, as was done during the colonial period, Western societies are now using the under developed nature of developing countries as training grounds for their own teachers and other professionals. However, as with much social research, the results are more complex.

The aim of this chapter is twofold: Firstly, to analyse the research in terms of post colonial theory by applying the theoretical concepts outlined in chapter two to the findings of the study; and secondly, to identify some limiting factors within the dissertation.

5.2 Analysis

5.2.1 Volunteers: Ambassadors for the West

Western volunteers working in Ghana act as ambassadors for their home countries. Although an increasing number of Ghanaian people now have access to Western media output, for many the only impression they have of Westerners will come from their contact with volunteers. In this sense, volunteers have taken over one of the roles formally played by the colonial administrators. This may, at least in part, explain the comparisons made between volunteers and colonial administrators by some Ghanaian people.

It is important for volunteers to take this responsibility seriously, as one of the VSO volunteers stated that before he arrived in his host community the previous volunteer had developed a bad reputation for drinking too much, and as a result the community had become suspicious of Westerners.

It is clear that volunteers do not wield any direct power over local people. However, as Said (1989:207) argues, the legacy of colonialism has developed a culture of dependency in which developing countries have become dependent on aid and assistance from the West. Therefore it could be argued that the very fact that Ghana and other developing countries require volunteers to perform key roles in their public services is continuing the humiliation of being colonised.

5.2.2 Why do Ghanaians Welcome Volunteers in to their Communities?

The friendly and welcoming nature of the Ghanaian communities, as expressed by all the volunteers interviewed, warrants further attention. The evidence produced by Porter (2003) and Pink (1998) (discussed in section 3.7.2) is contradictory. Porter suggests that the welcoming nature of the Ghanaian communities can be explained by their culture, while Pink propounds that local people try to analyse Westerners and work out how best to use them for their own advantage.

The evidence from the interviews seems to suggest that the volunteers generally perceived the Ghanaians as genuinely welcoming and interested in them. However, a number of volunteers did comment that towards the end of their stay many people wanted contact details and were keen to make a claim on belongings being left behind by the volunteer. Furthermore, the comment by one volunteer that she did not think that the Ghanaian teachers really cared what she gained from the experience was particularly revealing. This seems to indicate that although the

teachers were happy to welcome the volunteer into their community, they were not prepared to go out of their way to help them and enhance their experience.

The evidence suggests that Ghanaians are motivated to welcome volunteers into their community for a combination of reasons; according to their culture it is the right thing to do, they are genuinely friendly and inquisitive people and they hope to somehow benefit from the volunteers. This adds further weight to Said's arguments regarding dependency. In a video produced by VSO as part of their volunteer training programme which interviews a number of Ghanaian people about their perceptions of volunteers, several of them made the point that volunteers are great for motivating Ghanaian people to work hard (if they see the volunteers have made the effort to come to Ghana they are also motivated to work hard). However, they also indicated that it was vital to avoid a colonial style relationship where local people approach volunteers and ask for assistance as they would have done with the colonial administrators.

5.2.3 What can volunteers achieve?

Amongst the long-term professional volunteers there was a general consensus that the greatest contribution they could make to the local community was through providing quality teaching to pupils and enhancing their experience of education. The short-term gap year volunteers were less enthusiastic about the contribution they could make towards the community. They saw their role more as offering support to the permanent teachers and generally giving the Ghanaian people a chance to get to know an English person. They agreed that although they were not able to offer as much help in terms of providing a service as the VSO volunteers, they could contribute by bringing much needed revenue into the community.

A recurring theme throughout the discussion on the effectiveness of volunteers has been their limited usefulness in helping to achieve wider development goals. The evidence from this study generally supports this. However, the value to individual Ghanaians who have benefited from enhanced education from qualified Western teachers must not be undermined, further enhancing the need to distinguish between professional and gap year volunteers.

Nevertheless, the study did reveal that international volunteering considerably increased the volunteer's knowledge and understanding of the many problems faced by people in the developing world and that these experiences had stayed with them once they returned to their home countries. A number of volunteers commented that they would consider the environmental and social actions of organisations before they applied to work for them. Furthermore, many of the returned volunteers expressed an interest in working within the development sector.

Related to this point is the work conducted by Kothari (2003) on colonial officers who returned to the UK to seek work after the colonies gained independence. Many of them entered jobs within the development sector. Kothari focuses on the influence of the experiences of colonialism on their work within the development sector. At the beginning of the twenty first century there is no longer a supply of ex-colonial officers to fill the jobs within the development sector; it would be interesting to conduct further research to establish if ex-volunteers have taken over these jobs and if so how their experience of volunteering is now influencing the development industry.

5.2.4 Benefits to the volunteer

A number of recent studies have commented on the significant benefits gained by young Western volunteers working in developing countries (e.g. Thomas 2001; Jones 2004). These

findings have been replicated by the present study: All the volunteers interviewed agreed that they had benefited significantly from volunteering and had gained significantly from the experience. Furthermore, all the volunteers agreed that they had gained more from the community than they were able to give back.

The true value of such experiences for gaining employment and career progression are questioned by Thomas (2001:8) who propounds that volunteers often find it difficult to utilise the skills developed while engaged in international volunteering once they return to their home countries. This is in part due to employers' reluctance to recognise their experiences as a career development episode or as a valuable training ground for higher order skills. Rather, they see it as time away from a proper UK based career and therefore do not understand the relevance of the volunteer's skills base to their employability.

However, evidence from the present study and to some extent Jones (2004) suggests that the skills developed from international volunteering do in fact help returned volunteers develop their careers. For example, skills such as confidence, resourcefulness and communication come across in job applications and interviews regardless of whether the employer recognizes that they have developed from volunteering experiences. Furthermore, all the volunteers interviewed noted that their experiences had, at least to some extent, helped them focus and evaluate the direction they wanted their careers to go once they returned home.

5.3 Limiting factors

5.3.1 Problem of definition

A central theme of the research has been to make a distinction between long-term 'professional' volunteers and short-term 'gap year' volunteers. It was clear from the interviews I conducted

that the VSO volunteers who had been working in a community for a minimum of two years had made a much bigger impact than those engaged in short term projects. This, however, contradicts Andrew Jones's findings in his recent Review of Gap Year Provision produced for the Department of Education, where he suggests that overseas volunteering is more likely to have greater benefits to the host community when run as part of a group structured project (such as offered by Raleigh International) than when gap year participants are placed individually or in small groups (such as VSO) (Jones: 2004:56).

One explanation for this contradiction is the way in which Jones categorises gap year participants - he groups together everyone between the age of 16 and 25 who takes time out of education or employment. This definition is fundamentally flawed and makes it impossible to compare the impact of volunteers in relation to their qualifications, age, and experience. For instance, it would be reasonable to suggest that leaving an 18 year old school leaver to their own devices in a rural community to teach for two years would probably not have a positive impact on either the community or the volunteer. However, putting a 23 year old well-trained, qualified teacher in the same situation would be more likely to have a successful outcome.

Due to the limited scope of the current study it has not been possible to carry out any research into the impact of group projects carried out by Western volunteers. However, evidence from a brief analysis of volunteer agency web sites has shown that projects of this nature, such as Raleigh International, tend to attract graduates or school leavers who fit into the 'short term gap year volunteer' category. As has been demonstrated by the current research, 'short term gap year volunteers' generally have a limited impact on their host communities. Therefore Jones's conclusions that young people in this category work better in groups than if they are placed on their own may in fact be valid. Nevertheless, this does not detract from the fact that, to properly

analyse the impact of volunteers, it is important to categorise them in terms of their qualifications, type of programme and length of placement, rather than just age.

5.3.2 Volunteers from developing countries

Due to a limited amount of time and resources this dissertation has had to focus exclusively on Western volunteers working in developing countries. It has not been possible to examine the impact of volunteers from developing countries. Organisations such as VSO and Student Partnership World Wide organise placements where Western Volunteers are paired up with a 'home volunteer' to work on joint projects. VSO also recruits volunteers from developing countries to work aboard, this is known as 'South South' volunteering.

According to their web site Student Partnership World Wide (SPW) claims that they bring *'young people from the developed and the developing world to live and work together in rural communities. Sharing knowledge, experience and ideas, they achieve much more than either group could alone'*. Although it has not been possible to conduct any research into this claim, it is clear that this type of volunteering would involve the host country to a much greater extent and would spread the benefits of the volunteering process to the developing world. However, to come to any firm conclusion regarding 'south south' volunteering it would be necessary to conduct further research.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusions

6.1 Recommendations

The research has produced some interesting findings on the nature of international volunteering. As a result it has been possible to produce some recommendations which could potentially enhance the experience for volunteers, host communities and agencies sending volunteers abroad. In addition it is hoped that these recommendations may go some way to reducing some of the potentially damaging effects of international volunteering.

6.1.1 Limits on the opportunities available for school leavers and recent graduates without professional experience or qualifications.

A recurring theme running throughout this dissertation has been the distinction between ‘professional volunteers’ and ‘gap year volunteers’ with the overwhelming conclusion that ‘professional volunteers are much more effective. Although it is recognised that all volunteer placements could have a potentially damaging impact it is clear that the work of professional volunteers can be so valuable that the positive effects outweigh possible negative consequences.

There are two main concerns with regard to gap year volunteers. First, they often take on roles for which they are not suitably qualified and second, the short period of their stay means that their host communities and colleagues end up spending a considerable amount of time training them for only a limited return.

It is therefore important that volunteer agencies pay more attention to placing gap year volunteers. Agencies should conduct detailed research in to placements and establish exactly what the volunteer is going to be required to do, and check that the employer has the capacity to host the volunteer. It would also be helpful if volunteers could overlap with their predecessors, as this gives them a chance to learn about the community from someone else who has experienced it as an outsider. Furthermore, evidence from Jones's (2004) study suggests that structured group projects may be more suitable for 'gap year' volunteers than projects where they are left on their own in a host community.

6.1.2 Encourage Potential Volunteers to Research Agencies and Projects Before Embarking on Them

One of the surprising outcomes of the primary research was that none of the volunteers interviewed had done any research in to the agency sending them or the type of project they were going to be engaged in. Several of the volunteers had simply followed the advice of a careers advisor without comparing the projects offered by different companies.

It is important to encourage potential volunteers to conduct in depth research in to the volunteer agencies and projects before they sign up. This should ensure that they are fully aware of what they are letting themselves in for and be better prepared. Furthermore, it would force agencies to offer more detailed descriptions of projects and make unscrupulous agencies accountable for their actions.

6.1.3 Preparing to volunteer

The research made a clear distinction between VSO volunteers and BUNAC volunteers in terms of how prepared they were for volunteering. VSO runs a comprehensive training programme for all its volunteers, which not only covers professional skills but also introduces the volunteer to concepts of development and their role within wider development agendas. This is something that other agencies could learn from. It would be helpful if the government could produce guidelines outlining a minimum standard of training volunteers should receive before engaging in work in a developing country.

6.1.4 Programmes should aim to develop partnerships between volunteers and local populations.

The primary aim of volunteer placements should be to build strong links between host communities and volunteers. It is clear that this is easier for those on long-term placements as they have more time to make friends and have an impact on the community. Although the scope of the current research has not allowed for any analysis of ‘south south’ volunteering or schemes where a partnerships is formed between Western and Southern volunteers, this type of volunteering should be encouraged as it transfers some of the benefits of volunteering to the South.

As this study has demonstrated one of the central benefits gained by Westerners engaged in volunteer work is a better understanding of the problems faced by people in developing countries. If close partnerships are formed between local and Western volunteers these benefits can only be enhanced. An additional benefit of this type of volunteering is that the local

volunteer is able to help the Westerners settle in and learn about their community, removing some of the burden from the host community.

6.2 Conclusions

The purpose of the research was to analyse the experience of returned Western volunteers who had engaged in volunteer work in Ghana to establish if they acted as agents for the continuation of the colonial legacy. The research focused on three areas, the relationship between volunteers and their host communities, motivations for engaging in volunteer work and the benefits gained by the volunteers and host communities.

6.2.1 Main Findings

A distinction has to be made between 'professional long term volunteers' and 'short term gap year volunteers'. It was clear that long term professional volunteers were much more likely to make a useful contribution to their host communities as they possessed useful skills which were in demand and stayed with the communities for an extended period of time, allowing them to build proactive relationships with colleagues. Furthermore, all the professional volunteers interviewed had gone through VSO, which provides an excellent training programme compared to the agencies sending gap year volunteers.

All the volunteers interviewed reported having a good relationship with their host communities and considered the Ghanaian people to be extremely welcoming and friendly. Substantial research has already been conducted in to general relationships between Westerners working in developing countries and local people. Evidence put forward by Pink (1998) and Porter (2003), suggests that it is a culturally important for Ghanaian people to welcome strangers in to their communities and also that host communities have ulterior motives for welcoming Westerners as

they try and manipulate them for their own advantage. There is evidence to suggest that this relationship has developed out of a culture of dependency continuing from the colonial period.

The study has shown that there is substantial evidence that international volunteering develops a number of key higher order skills, such as, communication, and confidence, which are invaluable to returned volunteers seeking employment back in their home country. The benefits received by the volunteers far out way the contribution they were able to give to their host communities, even the professional volunteers agreed that they had gained more than they had given. This triggers an ethical dilemma. Developing countries are essentially being used as training grounds for professionals working in the West. There is a general consensus that if a person can do a job in a developing country with limited recourses they will be even better at it in the UK. This is particularly relevant for the education sector. However, it is clear that the chronic lack of qualified teachers across the developing world means that without Western volunteers many children would go without any education.

Due to the limited scope of this study it has been impossible to gather any empirical data on the impact of volunteering on communities, however, it was clear from the interviews with returned volunteers that they perceived their influence to have been wider than simply through their professional work. In fact the gap year volunteers interviewed acknowledged that their impact in the work place had been extremely limited but claimed to have felt that they had a positive effect on the wider community, even if it was simply by renting a room in the village.

However, the impact of volunteering cannot be measured simply by the success of a volunteer's achievement abroad. All the volunteers interviewed agreed that the experience had taught them a great deal about the problems faced by developing countries and motivated them to think

carefully what type of career they wanted to go in to. Furthermore, the comments made by the volunteer who had been in Ghana in the 1960s suggest that the experience of volunteering does not only affect short term career choices. It would be interesting to conduct further research with volunteers from this generation to assess the longer term impacts on returned volunteers' life choices.

Overall the evidence suggests that volunteers do play a role in continuing the legacy of colonialism, and help to reinforce the dependency of developing countries on the West. However, they also do a lot of important and useful tasks, especially the professional volunteers, which enhance the quality of life of many people in the developing world. It is clear that the success of a volunteer placement is dependent on the suitability of the volunteer for the role they are engaged in and their ability to build proactive working and social relationships with the host community. Much of this responsibility is placed in the hands of agencies sending volunteers aboard; as a result it is important that they act in a professional and responsible manner. It is essential that agencies consider the impact of volunteers on host communities with the same degree of significance as the personal development of the volunteer.

Appendix 1

Interview Guide

Can we start with some biographical details?

How old were you when you were volunteering?

When were you volunteering?

Which organisation were you volunteering with?

How long was your placement?

What job were you doing while you were volunteering?

So why did you want to volunteer in a developing country?

Why Ghana?

Why did you choose to go with.. (*organisation*)

How much did you know about the organisation before you went?

Before you started the job did you have any qualifications or experience that was relevant to the job?

Did the organisation run any orientation or preparation for the placement? If so what did it consist of? Was it useful?

Do you think you were adequately qualified and prepared for the job before you started?

Before you left the UK were you worried about what you would be able to achieve?

Do you think the community you were in benefited from having volunteers? How?

Working relationships with local people? Involvement in project? Training?

How did the local population react to your presence in the community?

How do you think they felt about your presence?

Did you ever experience any form of hostility from the local people about your presence in the community?

How did the community react when you left?

Were you replaced by another group of volunteers?

Do you know if the work you were doing was sustained after you left?

Have you/ did kept in touch with any of the people from the community?

Did you benefit from the experience?

How?

Can you think of any particular skills you gained or were able to improve during your time as a volunteer?

Do you think your attitudes and ideas about people in developing countries has changed as a result of your experience

Has the experience had an influence on the course of career has taken?

Do you think you were able to give as much to the community as you gained from the experience?

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