

**International Development Department
The University of Birmingham**



**Gap Year International Volunteer Programmes: Are they
irrelevant to the effort to reduce poverty?**

Dissertation

MSc Poverty Reduction & Development Management (International)

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Executive Summary

Poverty reduction in the developing world is one of today's major challenges. There are many theories and opinions about how this challenge can be overcome; there are some who try to make a contribution through their voluntary efforts. Whilst the popular perception is that volunteer's actions are somewhat helpful in reducing poverty, the impact that volunteers can make is, in general, ignored by 'professional' workers and academics within the International Development sector; this would seem to suggest that the involvement of volunteers in development work is deemed, in the main, to be irrelevant. Some observers, whilst not ignoring the work of volunteers, do however, doubt the extent of their usefulness and go as far as to claim that their actions can be damaging to the communities in which they work.

It is no surprise that many working in the volunteer sector hold an alternative view.

This study discusses the impact that young, unskilled, short term volunteers have, whilst working on overseas projects designed to reduce poverty in the developing world. The research is based on the results of questionnaires completed by returned volunteers, comments made by 'key commentators', and on semi-structured interviews conducted, on location, with Guaymi indigenous people of Costa Rica who worked on local projects, aimed at poverty reduction, with a volunteer organisation called Raleigh International.

The overriding conclusion of this study is that although some organisations using young, unskilled, short term volunteers have major short comings others, when organising and training their volunteers appropriately, not only make an apt contribution towards poverty reduction, but also offer the International Development sector some alternative ideas for working successfully with small, poor, rural communities.

Although, the poverty reducing impacts of using these volunteers is limited, the work of the volunteers is far from irrelevant to the local communities and individuals who benefit from their actions.

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Acronyms

IV	International Volunteer
GY	Gap Year
GYV	Gap Year Volunteer
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas
UN	United Nations
RI	Raleigh International

1. Introduction

This dissertation sets out to discover the impact that young, unskilled, short term International Volunteers (referred to as Gap Year Volunteers (GYVs) in this dissertation) have upon poverty reduction within the developing world. A Case Study of a partnership between the Guaymi indigenous people of Costa Rica (representing what is considered to be a poor community), and Raleigh International (a charity which operates by predominantly using GYVs in community projects in the developing world) will be used as the basis of the research. By comparing the Case Study findings with a literature review and analytical framework the dissertation attempts to determine whether these GYVs have any relevance in the fight to reduce poverty.

Volunteering is a broad, complicated and diverse subject with many different organisations having very different *raison d'être*; also these volunteers bring a myriad of skills and motivations to the volunteer arena. However, this dissertation will concentrate on structured UK Gap Year (GY) programmes that are designed in part to aid poverty reduction through projects specifically based in the developing world. The GY sector generally offers short term programmes (normally less than 3 months) where the vast majority of volunteers are aged between 17-25 years old, and therefore, generally lack the skills and experience of older volunteers; I have generalised and termed these young volunteers as unskilled. In essence, by focusing on the 'lowest common denominator', the dissertation looks at whether unskilled volunteers with enthusiasm and good intentions can be organised and used, over a short period of time, in a way to make a meaningful contribution towards poverty reduction.

1.1 Structure

The research paper will consist of five chapters; the introduction will set out the justification and purpose of the study and deal with areas of definition. The Literature

Review in Chapter two will explain the analytical framework for the study, and synthesise and comment upon the key literature relating to the dissertation question.

Chapter three will give the background for the Case Study used in the research; areas covered will include Costa Rica, the Guaymi Indigenous people, and Raleigh International (RI).

Chapter four deals with the research methodology, findings, summary, and limitations.

Conclusions will be made in Chapter five.

1.2 Rational for Dissertation

The UN Volunteer Report (2006) states that at the heart of its organisation is the conviction that voluntary action by many millions of people is a vastly under recognised and underutilised resource, one that if fully harnessed could strengthen efforts in tackling development challenges worldwide. The report points out that International Volunteers (IVs) make important economic and social contributions and their actions can contribute to a more cohesive society by building trust and reciprocity among citizens.

Taylor (1997, p.18) believes that volunteers act of a *“freer more generous spirit”*, where people take action for the *“common good”* and not for *“private advantage”*; he also says that the voluntary sector has a *“claim to virtue”*. Despite these, and many other ringing endorsements for the volunteer movement, there is some doubt about whether certain types of volunteering can make a relevant contribution towards poverty reduction. Howes (2001, p.167) says that volunteering is vulnerable to the charge that *“it is irrelevant to the mainstream development effort to reduce poverty”*; Griffin (2004) notes that there is little empirical evidence to substantiate the claim that GYVs (whom he terms ‘Volunteer Tourists’) benefit the communities in which they work, and Jones (2003) adds that there is a valid academic debate to be made around what value this kind of overseas voluntary work can add to wider development objectives in host communities.

Simpson (2004) sees the lack of research or critical examination in this sector as having produced an industry reliant on an approach premised on enthusiasm and good intentions; this simplistic approach being at odds with the “*acknowledged complexity of development theory and practice in academic and policy debates*”.

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.

The non-profit making organisation Worldwide Volunteering provides a data base of volunteer opportunities containing some 1400 organisations offering 1,000,000 placements annually to IVs in 200 countries (Worldwide Volunteering Website, 2007); Jones (2004) determined that some 350,000 of these overseas placements are taken up by young people each year through structured programmes worldwide; he adds that although the numbers are unclear large numbers of those volunteering overseas come from the UK. Simpson (2003) is clearer with her estimates; her interview with the Chairman of the Year Out Group (a body representing 37 UK GY organisations) showed that some 10,000 young people in the UK volunteered in 2001 in order to partake in projects and activities in the Developing world. The Year Out Group website (2007) claims that some 39,000 people took a GY in 2006; this represents a nearly four fold increase in only five years.

It would appear that GYVs 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.

1.3 Research Questions and Analytical Framework

The dissertation aims to address the following questions;

1. Does the deployment of GYVs to poor communities for short periods of time aid poverty reduction?
2. What are the impacts of deploying GYVs to work in poor communities for short periods of time?

In order to address these questions the dissertation will start by presenting an analytical framework incorporated into a synthesis of existing literature; the results from the field research will then be compared to this.

It has been decided to use a very broad approach, in terms of the research questions and the analytical framework, to conduct the dissertation's research within. There is limited relevant literature available and very little research that has been carried out on this subject. In order to capture the full extent of any impacts it has been necessary to present the research within a wide spectrum; thus research questions explore any impacts made in relation to poverty reduction. This has allowed the responses from the interviewees, who may have a limited understanding of development issues as presented within the academic world, to have a greater chance of relevance to the dissertation question.

The focus of this dissertation is on poverty reduction. It is generally considered that the concept of poverty is multi-dimensional. Current terminology includes many concepts of poverty which are broadly covered under the four approaches of Monetary, Capacity, Participatory Methods, and Social Exclusion as outlined by Laderchi *et al* (2003, p.247). This dissertation will concentrate on these four concepts in order to judge the poverty reducing impacts of the GYV¹.

¹ The four approaches will be explained in greater depth in Chapter Two.

1.4 Definitions

The section concerning definitions has been incorporated into the early part of the dissertation in order to provide some clarity to the reader. Although the issue of poverty reduction is fundamental in the academic world of International Development, volunteering is less familiar, and the GY phenomenon will most likely represent a new area of research to many within the International Development field².

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 too wide-ranging to be considered helpful. 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 (Roberts, 2004, p.25).

In modern and biblical Hebrew, the term volunteer is derived from a word meaning “*to willingly give,*” which may also be interpreted as a charitable donation (Cnaan *et al*, 1996). For the purpose of this study there are three basic criteria that can help set volunteering apart from other types of activity: It is not carried out for financial gain (VSO and Peace Corp would argue that they cover volunteers’ expenses and do not pay them for gain), it is carried out of your own free will, and it benefits a third party or society at large (VSO, 2005, p.6).

International Volunteering

Volunteering in an international context incorporates some of the themes of volunteering, but it is also quite different. IVs are individuals who travel to other countries, usually developing countries, to work on projects designed to help alleviate poverty and achieve positive sustainable development. Projects can be

² Readers may also wish to view Appendix 1, p.61 which gives a précis of some of the key authors referred to in this dissertation.

a short or long term commitment, typically lasting from a week to two years, and the IVs forgo a normal wage they would earn in the developed world (Thomas, 2001, p.21).

Developing Countries

A developing country is characterised by a low gross domestic product and income *per capita*, intolerable debt burdens and low living standards (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987).

Young people

'Child' is defined as a person under the age of 18, but UK law has no definition of what constitutes a young person (Youth Policies in the UK website, 2007). Birmingham Youth Service (website, 2007) works with people aged 11-25 years old and Manchester Youth Service (website, 2007) with people aged 13+ years old; this suggests a fairly arbitrary approach to the age that defines a young person. For the purpose of this dissertation we will use the age range put forward by two GY organisations, RI and Quest Overseas, which is 17-25 years old. Like the majority of the GY sector, one of their key aims is to offer a personal development experience for young people; The Oxford Dictionary (1998) defines youth as "*an early stage of development*"; both RI and Quest Overseas aim to develop people at this early stage.

Gap Year

A sector, including profit making and charitable organisations, has developed over the last 20 years to provide International Volunteering opportunities for young people taking their GY (Jones, 2004).

Young people who take a GY are generally considered to be students taking a year out of their studies before taking up a place at a University or students who take a year out after completing their University studies. During this GY the individuals may take up a variety of activities, which may or may not involve

overseas volunteer work; this is problematic because it does not represent a tightly-defined phenomenon. However, for the purpose of this study Simpson's (2003) view of the GY as a period of time when young people travel, often abroad, for at least part of the time and are also involved in some kind of work of a voluntary or paid nature, will be used.

It should be noted that many people participating on GY Programmes do not fit this definition e.g. RI recruits non-university volunteers from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people taking a career break, and skilled volunteer staff (aged 25+ years old) to manage the young people and the programme.

Gap Year International Volunteer Programmes

The GY industry includes a diverse range of organisations, which offer a huge variety of possible types of voluntary work with the commonest types being community and social work, teaching, conservation, and environmental projects (Jones, 2004). There are also divisions between commercial and charitable organisations, and between those that offer group based projects or individual placements.

A charity is less likely to be motivated by profit and therefore is more likely to make decisions that will benefit the host communities as well as the volunteers. Commercial organisations may well be inclined to meet their customers needs (the volunteers) before considering any effects on the host community. Jones's (2004) research also indicated that overseas volunteering is more likely to have greater benefits to host communities when run as part of a group structured project, which offers greater support (e.g. support staff, medical back up, cultural awareness training etc;), than when GY participants are placed individually without such support; as well as being ineffective these unsupported volunteers can also be a drain on local resources, as host communities have to provide the missing back up.

The dissertation, whilst commenting upon the full range of organisations in chapters such as the literature review, will focus its research element upon a

charity, RI, which offers group based projects; the reason behind this is that this organisation has a long history (established in 1984), is well known (Prince William partook in an expedition to Chile in 2001), it sends some 1,000 young volunteers overseas per year (Vidal, 2001), and because the author of the dissertation has extensive experience of working with the organisation.

Short and Long Term; Skilled and Unskilled

IVs cannot all be grouped together; a clear distinction must be drawn between long-term 'professional' volunteers and short-term GY volunteers. Roberts (2004) feels that 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 GY volunteer placements usually last for less than six months (Simpson, 2004).

Second, long-term volunteers often receive some form of allowance for their work e.g. VSO pay a local salary, and meet expense for flights, medical insurance, and accommodation (VSO website, 2007). On the other hand, the GY volunteers receive no payment and usually pay for the privilege of volunteering e.g. the cost of a 10 week RI programme is £2995 plus the cost of the flight (RI website, 2007).

Third, professional volunteers are usually well qualified in the field they are working in and have substantial professional experience. GY volunteers rarely have any professional experience or qualifications; although, clearly they will all have, as each and every human being does have, skills and experience to offer, their lack of extensive professional/technical experience and lack of professional qualifications has led to them, for the purpose of this study, to be labeled as unskilled.

2. Literature Review

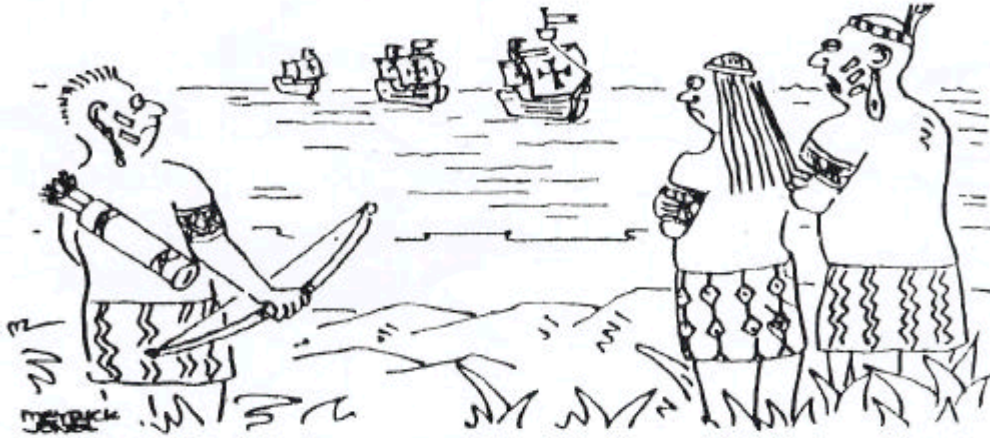
This chapter will introduce and synthesise the literature relating to International Volunteerism within the GY industry. This dissertation represents one of the early attempts to study the impact of GYVs upon host communities, in terms of poverty reduction and therefore the literature available to review is limited. Enrichs (2000) believes that this is due to the small scale and altruistic nature of many volunteer sending agencies which means that they are not subject to the same scrutiny by media or academia as large development institutions are.

It is also important to address the issue of what Griffin (2004, p.42) terms “*the shockingly blatant omission from nearly every discursive source of the voice of the destination communities*”. Pink (1998, p.9) supports Griffin’s views, saying that “*it is important to situate our understanding of helping ...in terms of local people’s understandings*”. Although Griffin (2004, p.42) found literally thousands of website accounts from returned volunteers relating to their views on the volunteer experience, he was unable to locate “*even one significant opportunity to access the opinions of those who are in receipt of this good will*”.

This dissertation attempts to address this imbalance in understanding by soliciting views from a host community, but it should be noted that the literature review will, unfortunately, be somewhat devoid of the opinions of the most relevant stakeholders.

Firstly, this chapter will present a short background of International volunteering and the UK GY sector. The literature review will then proceed to discuss the poverty reducing impacts, within Laderchi *et al*’s framework, of GY programmes upon host communities.

2.1 A Context of International Volunteering and the UK Gap Year Sector



"Gan veer kids. I expect"

Figure 1: (Private Eye 2003, p.13)

Simpson (2004) points to the evidence of the roots of volunteering being in their use in various wars e.g. the Spanish civil war and the Boer war. These volunteer forces comprised of international soldiers, for example, the Boer War included volunteers from Canada, New Zealand and Australia, while Irish and Scottish volunteers fought in the battle of independence in Columbia and Venezuela. Simpson believes that the volunteers were inspired by a mixture of idealism, expediency and opportunism; a mixture that continues to influence contemporary IVs today.

Thomas (2001, p.24) identifies the modern phenomenon of volunteering in the UK deriving from the end of National Service³ in the 1950's; for example, VSO was established in Britain in 1958. Early volunteers were mainly young school leavers or graduates fulfilling education or administration posts overseas. Skill levels were relatively low and assignment goals quite simple.

³ National Service being the common name for Military Service; in the UK, between 1949 and 1960 every healthy UK male aged between 18 and 26 was required by law to serve in the armed services for 18 months.

Meanwhile, IV programmes were also started in other countries, for example, Peace Corp was founded in the USA in 1960, the 'Canadian Executive Service Organisation' came into being in 1967, and the 'Japan Overseas Corporation Volunteers' was established in 1965 (Simpson, 2004).

Adams (1968), in his book about the first 10 years of VSO, suggests that the origins of the GY can be traced back to what VSO called "*The Year Between*". It is notable that VSO, an organisation that now promotes the view that IVs should be skilled and committed to a long term placement, started life as an agency recruiting young people partaking in a "*year between*" i.e. starting at the end of a university education and terminating on a return to the UK to take up a professional work placement. Although these volunteers didn't meet the VSO modern day criteria, Adams (1968) describes them as being "*remarkably successful*" and the benefits of the volunteer experience as being "*mutual*"; an indication that the host communities benefited from the partnership as well as the volunteers. During this early period of VSO's existence essentially only non-qualified manpower was provided; skills were not crucial, what was needed says Adams, was a "*willingness to tackle whatever came to hand*". A rapidly growing number of IV providers, particularly based in Britain and aimed at the GY market, have continued the practice. The focus of these programmes tends to be that specific skills are not necessary in order to participate; such an approach exists in stark contrast to organisations such as VSO, for whom the focus on skills transfer is now central (Simpson, 2004).

The last 25 years has seen a revolution in youth travel and international volunteering. Thomas (2001, p.15) points out that more and more individuals are proactively seeking international experience to broaden their skills and world view. She quotes a 'Guardian' survey from 2001 showing that working internationally is a career goal for almost half of British graduates.

From this 'demand' an entire modern day 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. According to Roberts (2004, p.25) the GY industry is an extremely lucrative business; the international GY sector is now said to be worth £800 million annually (Worricker, 2007); there is clearly a danger, in the modern GY sector, that the pursuit of profit is made at the expense of formulating appropriate, poverty reducing projects with host communities. Roberts (*ibid*) believes that there is considerable concern surrounding the true motivations for sending young people aboard and extensive debate regarding what they will achieve.

Simpson (2004, p.41) asserts that there is a “*general vagueness that permeates much of this modern industry*” and that there appears to be a deliberate policy of avoiding the language of International Development. She also laments that questions about long term strategy, along with questions about the appropriateness and impact of volunteers, appear to be missing from the majority of GY programmes. She concludes that if GY organisations of today wish to engage in a meaningful way with overseas host communities then they must work towards understanding the complex nature of International Development.

2.2 Gap Year Volunteer Programmes: Are they irrelevant to reducing poverty?

The evidence suggests that many GY participants who undertake voluntary work do so out of a combination of motivating factors but that an altruistic desire to contribute to society plays a significant role in that (Palmer 2002). The research questions whether or not the GYV does in fact make such a contribution. Taylor's 1982 Report on the British Volunteer Programme noted that “*it was evident during the evaluation that many of the younger volunteers even with very limited previous working experience were capable of excellent service*”.

By using the four concepts of poverty that make up the analytical framework previously mentioned, the study will now explore if 'excellent service' is provided.

Monetary

Desai (2002, p.33) mentions that, "*some...argue that income-poverty is what really matters*". The argument, Desai says, is supported by the high correlation between income and other measures of quality of life such as health and education status. The higher a person's income the greater command they have to purchase the requirements to lead a better life. The research will simply gauge whether the presence of volunteers adds, in any way, to the financial well being of the communities in which they work.

Howes (2001) cites a VSO internal report (VSO Indonesia, 1999) that purports that even a volunteer programme such as VSO's which specialises in sending skilled, long term volunteers is perceived to be "*a small fish in the ocean of development...and one which brings no money to the country (in which it operates)*". Roberts's (2004) research challenged this point of view; returned GY type volunteers agreed that one way in which they could contribute was by bringing and spending money in the communities in which they worked.

Dr Peter Slowe, Founder and Director of Teaching & Projects Abroad (Teaching & Projects Abroad website, 2007) declared that "*last year, we channelled into less developed countries the energy, skills and commitment of some 2,000 volunteers - not to mention nearly £2 million and the spending power of volunteers while they are abroad. This is quite an achievement*".

This achievement pales somewhat when compared with the annual aid budget of £3 billion spent on developing countries by the UK government (DFID, 2007).

Quest Overseas is a GY organisation that asks all team members to make a significant monetary contribution to the voluntary projects; funds that not only cover the costs of each project phase, but includes money to be available for the rest of the year when they are not 'on site'. Quest believes that their single most significant achievement is to have raised nearly £1,000,000, through 1,600

volunteers over the last decade. For example, a volunteer being asked to pay £1465 to take part in their Malawi Orphans and Community Project would know that before they even arrive in Malawi £300 (over 20%) had already gone directly to a school scholarship fund to sponsor a Malawian child through Secondary School for five years (Quest Overseas website, 2007).

It should be said that Quest Overseas is unique in their approach, although all of the 1400 organisations offering some 1,000,000 places worldwide (350,000 taken up by the young/unskilled) will contribute significant amounts in terms of volunteer spending power, in country transport costs, project materials, paying local labour etc; Not all of this money will directly benefit a given host community but much of it will benefit the economy, and therefore to some extent poor people, of a developing country. Winters *et al* (2003, p.3) argue that it is widely accepted among development practitioners and economists that the key to poverty reduction is through economic growth. It creates the resources to raise incomes, and even if 'trickle-down' is insufficient to bring the benefits to the poor, governments will have scope for stronger redistribution measures when income is higher and growing faster. It would therefore be fair to conclude that, although limited, the economic inputs associated with the GY sector do have a poverty reducing effect.

Capacities

The capacity or capability approach was developed by Sen (1985) who pointed out that "*ultimately, the focus has to be on what we can or cannot do, can or cannot be*". The focus is more upon what people can achieve and the opportunities that people have to pursue the lives that they choose. There is no widespread agreement as to what the basic capabilities should be to help people to achieve their 'realistic' goals, however, there is some accord on the areas of health, education, and water services. The literature review will focus upon these basic needs. The provision of infrastructure in this context combats the lack of services, such as health, clean water, appropriate sewerage etc; that contribute

towards people's poverty. According to this approach poverty will be at least somewhat alleviated if basic needs or infrastructure is provided; if people are educated and healthy then they are far more capable of achieving their realistic goals. Mattingly (1999, p.16) is clear about the importance of infrastructure provision for the poor, "*without adequate services a population can not rise above poverty.*" Potter & Lloyd-Evans (1998, p.93) see the provision of basic needs (infrastructure) "*as the best means to alleviate poverty at the household level*", whilst Amis (2000, p.1) is unambiguous, "*in a nutshell, infrastructure matters*".

GYVs can bring enthusiasm, effort and hard work, and so the idea that they can contribute towards poverty reduction through helping to construct a school or medical centre, for example, seems a sensible claim. On its sister website, Quest for Change (2007), Quest International lists some of its achievements as having "*built 2 large schools, 5 classrooms (and renovated many more), 1 large library (with books), 3 adventure playgrounds, a 2 floor accomodation block, several water tanks and a considerable amount of other school infrastructure*". RI's website (2007) claims that in Costa Rica and Nicaragua RI has "*built 23 water projects giving clean drinking water to thousands of Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans; 14 schools for children between the ages of 3 and 18; 10 community centres; 2 hostels to allow children to attend secondary school, a bridge and a health post*". The claims of these two organisations offers some evidence that GYVs can contribute towards improving infrastructure in poor communities; although an obvious criticism would be that they lack the necessary construction skills to carry out the relevant tasks to an acceptable standard.

When interviewed for this research paper a VSO representative touted the idea that although GYVs may provide some benefits to a community through a school construction or medical centre building project, it is a poor use of resources. Flying young people to developing countries at great expense to carry out work that local people could complete at a much reduced cost does not make sense; more could be done if the resources were

transferred directly to the beneficiaries. This may be true but it is also an unrealistic argument. People volunteer for a whole host of reasons, many of them for personal gain and development, and the majority of volunteers 'pay' for the volunteer experience themselves. The idea that volunteers would forgo the volunteer experience and send their money overseas in the cause of development is a fallacious claim. The debate is not about whether this type of development should occur via volunteers or local people but about whether it should occur through the volunteers or not at all. The communities in which many GY organisations work have often been overlooked or forgotten by government and the big aid agencies. As Taylor (1982, p.90) says the point is to "*Harness the volunteer effort...and bring into use skills and commitment which would probably otherwise not be available for a contribution to overseas development*".

Participation

The research will concentrate on Cornwall's (2000) three perspectives of participation in order to gauge the extent of the impact of the volunteer's interaction within the host community. The reader should note that the three perspectives have similarities and crossovers, where points made in one section may also be relevant in another section.

Due to the limitations of the literature available it should be noted that the evidence presented in this section is largely anecdotal.

(a) Self determination and empowerment

This perspective looks at participation as not only being about informing or collaborating with the institutions that determine projects and policies, but being able to make, rather than simply seek to influence, the decisions that matter.

White (1996) declares that the involvement of the local people in implementation is not enough; for a fully participatory project, they should also take part in management and decision-making. The research in this study will engage

respondents on who, they feel, held the power and who made the key decisions regarding the project.

Howes (2001, p.167) says that *“many development theorists see most Northern involvement in Southern institutions as an insidious influence on processes that should be driven by the people themselves”*. Howe’s comments almost suggest that there should be no Northern involvement whatsoever and this is certainly a point of view that holds some credence. However, as long as the process is ‘driven’ or even managed by the beneficiaries then a form of self determination and empowerment can be argued to be taking place.

During the 1976 International Conference on Volunteer Service (Ball *et al*, 1976, p.29) the majority of participants spoke of the value of the cross cultural experience of both parties. The volunteers were seen as creating a different concept of 'westerners' - working with their hands, living as equals, not donors. John Kamau, General Secretary of the National Christian Council of Kenya said of volunteers: *“They came with clear minds, ready to participate and involve themselves”* (Ball *et al*, 1976). This point of view implies a form of respect being shown to people in developing countries where their lives and cultures are valued; this can be an empowering experience. Indonesia’s ambassador to Canberra continues in a similar vein (Smillie, 1995, p.41) noting that; *“such a contribution is worth immeasurably more to us than the rupiahs which it saves our treasury.”* The willingness of the volunteer to work alongside host community members indicates an acceptance that poor people have a valid way of life and a right to their own self determination.

Taylor’s (1982, p.79) research suggested that *“volunteers living with and as the people may have more impact than highly skilled ex-pats living in luxury”*. This empowering form of solidarity sees foreign volunteers being more readily accepted and integrated into daily life. The foreign worker, on the other hand,

even one who willingly lives a frugal existence, may be viewed with suspicion and/or be misunderstood (Palmer, 2002, p.639).

Baker (1996, p.103) feels that IVs maintain a distinction from other outsider development workers because they are perceived as being motivated by “*some degree of idealism, or humanism*”. High minded ideals and acts of altruism related to volunteerism can indeed, it seems, be truly empowering in nature, and perhaps in this area the volunteer can have greater impact than the paid development worker.

(b) Increased Efficiency within the Programme

This perspective is based on Cornwall’s (2000) evidence that projects stood a better chance of success if people were involved more directly in them. Local people will have knowledge of the local area; they will have useful relationships and contacts; skills applicable to local conditions etc; these factors can lead to programmes being completed more effectively and often at a much cheaper financial cost. Participation from local people can also help to ensure that the project tackles the problems experienced by them rather than those perceived by the volunteer (Overseas Development Group, 1978).

The author’s research will directly engage with stakeholders to ask them if host community involvement in the project increased its efficiency.

The volunteers’ contribution to efficiency can be a very simple one i.e. the fact that their input and labour comes as ‘free’. However, the Overseas Development Group (1978) feels that the argument heralding volunteers as cost-effectiveness may be a feeble one. They argue that there is no merit in being cheap for the sake of it, since efficiency is not equated with quality or absolute cost.

(c) Mutual Learning

Cornwall’s (2000) third perspective of participation emphasises the need for a closer relationship between those who work in development and those whom it is intended to benefit. Participation involves working with people, rather than on or for them. The importance here is placed on people’s engagement as active

subjects who participate, co-operate and contribute their own resources to the process of their own development. The role of external resources and agents of change are also recognised in facilitating development processes. Participation is cast as a mutual learning experience that focuses on enhancing communication, respect, listening and learning between development workers and those they serve. Unfortunately, during the literature review the author of this dissertation was unable to find any research that had been conducted on whether or not host communities learnt anything from GY volunteers. However, Roberts's (2004) research showed that GY volunteers felt that their volunteering experience considerably increased their 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 or spent their money with them. Furthermore, many of the returned volunteers expressed an interest in working within the development sector.

Smillie (1995, p.42) adds that *"Nobody has done a survey, but it is safe to say that a significant proportion of the mid-level and senior staff in most bilateral development agencies, and many in the multilateral system, began their careers as volunteers"*. Thomas (2001, p.25) noted that returned volunteers possessed a massive ability to shape attitudes, change mindsets, and give global perspectives to domestic situations. Taylor's, Thomas's, and Smillie's findings together represent a case for an increased political awareness and understanding of developmental issues through the activity of International Volunteering, perhaps leading to positive action in support of the world's poor. Thomas continues to point out that many volunteers who took part in his research realised the importance of them raising awareness of poverty issues on their return to the UK. Paul Theroux, author of a dozen best-selling novels and an accomplished travel writer, was also a Peace Corp Volunteer in Malawi. Smillie (1995, p.40) attributes the following quote to Theroux (1986);

“I do not believe Africa is a very different place for having played host to the Peace Corps.....but America is a quite a different place for having had so many returned Peace Corp Volunteers, and when they began joining the State Department and working in the embassies, these institutions were the better for it.”

Simpson (2004, p.192) recognises the potential for GY programmes to promote learning, but worries that organisations don't seem to have a defined educational methodology for stimulating such learning; a status she found to be common across the GY industry. She says that the sector has an almost total reliance on the mechanisms of 'contact'; that is, the assumption that through meeting 'others', one will come to better understandings of, and with, them. In addition to contact, there is also a reliance on the power of 'experience', in and of itself, to act as a sufficient educational methodology. Simpson uses the work of Wade (2000) to make her point; Wade argues that there are three steps to providing a social justice education. First, there is personal experience, then critical reflection and, finally, action. Simpson (2004, p.197) feels that GY projects have the potential to operate within such a model of social justice education, but in their current form they ignore the second and third steps in this process, presuming them to be automatic outcomes of the first.

Simpson (2004, p.218) continues to say that If GY programs are to become more than *“short-term theme park experiences”* they need to engage directly in the possibilities and mechanisms for action. She adds that at the moment *“a lasting sense of social responsibility that will influence decision-making later in life, is optimistically, and rather simplistically, expected to come from one set of experiences”*. Such a model of 'social responsibility' does little to make visible or challenge the systemic nature of inequality or oppression, and as such makes scant provision for a 'justice' based agenda (Simpson, 2004, p.219).

The importance of following up on what Simpson (2004) terms as 'potential' is highlighted by Julius Nyerere's reply to a question asking him how best Oxfam might help Tanzania. His still valid advice was:

"Take each and every penny that you have planned for Tanzania and spend it in the United Kingdom explaining to your co-citizens the nature and causes of poverty" (Senillosa 1998, p8). Murphy (2000, p.344) also recognises the necessity of educating the Northern populace stating that development work *"is not built on sympathy or charity. It is not about fundraising to run projects overseas, but it is about taking actions within one's own terrain that will enhance the capacity of others to succeed in their fight against injustice."* This seems to suggest that the GY sector has the position within the International Development sector to make a notable contribution by educating young people, who can in turn raise poverty issues in their own countries. If Simpson's comments are correct then the GY sector is missing out on making, what could be, its greatest contribution towards poverty reduction.

Vidal, an ex-volunteer with RI and now a journalist with the Guardian newspaper wrote (Vidal, 2001) that, *"the volunteers were given no briefing of the politics of the country, or no overview of the wider social or physical environment"*. If RI and others within the GY sector wish to engage in providing young people with a sense of social responsibility then their approach would seem to need some adjustment.

Social Exclusion

The concept of social exclusion points to the multiple faces of deprivation; Townsend defines it as referring to people whom "are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs and activities" (See Laderchi *et al*, 2003, p.258). It is often a characteristic of groups (e.g. disabled, elderly, young, indigenous people etc;) rather than belonging to individuals; it is crucial for policy makers to identify categorisations of people who are 'left out' of generalised development processes and who, therefore, require special programming attention. The research will engage on whether the GY programmes include or exclude any

particular groups within the host communities in which they work.

The International Volunteer Service (IVS) *“is a peace organisation working for the sustainable development of local and global communities throughout the world”*. They publicise themselves as the leading charity involving volunteers in international voluntary projects. Their list of advertised projects are aimed at an array of socially excluded groups; disability, children, teenagers, older people, sexuality and gender, socially disadvantaged (e.g. homeless), as well as projects aimed at anti-racism and North/South solidarity are areas all clearly targeted (IVS website 2007).

RI has historically committed itself to working in ‘remote locations’; this often involves working with indigenous people in areas ignored by Governments and forgotten by ‘professional’ NGOs.

Many organisations, for example, Real Gap Experience, seem more concerned with pleasing the needs of the volunteer in their projects rather than working towards poverty reduction through tackling social exclusion. Prospective volunteers are asked to choose from a wide range of projects (Website, 2007), *“our offices and cooperating partners have developed a wide variety of programmes to help you make the most of your gap year or career break”*. The emphasis seems to be very much on helping ‘you’, the volunteer, and if your needs happen to fit in with working on a project aimed at benefiting the socially excluded then that’s great, but if not, then no matter. Judith Brodie, the director of VSO UK, showed concern that GY programmes seemed *“to satisfy the demands of the students rather than the needs of locals”*, she also lamented the prevalence of *“badly planned and supported schemes that are spurious - ultimately benefiting no one apart from the travel companies that organise them”* (Bennett, 2007).

It should be mentioned that Real Gap Experience do offer programmes of working with orphaned, abandoned, and street children; as well as projects aimed at children affected by AIDS, and disabled young adults. However, when reading through the highly polished and professional websites of the some 70 commercial International Volunteering GY organisations it is hard to feel that their *raison d'être* is little more than making money; one gets the feeling that projects are ultimately chosen on the whims and fashions of the volunteer and not in any concerted attempt at contributing to reducing social exclusion or poverty in general.

In contrast, Taylor (1982), whilst purporting that volunteers are not a panacea that will automatically bring help to the poorest people, believes that they can, however, inject stimuli into communities that are largely inaccessible to higher-status manpower aid. Howes (2001, p.5) gives the example of a local teacher who explained the importance of an IV visit in terms of how the experience of being together had "*been significant for us; what was important was the solidarity of having somebody come and live with us, in our community, under similar circumstances to the way in which we live*". This form of solidarity or inclusion is perhaps the greatest contribution that IVs can make in combating social exclusion.

3. Background information to the Case Study

This chapter will provide background information to the case study and introduce the research objectives. The background will include information on Costa Rica, RI, and indigenous people in Costa Rica.

In order to assist with answering the dissertation research question a field trip to Costa Rica was conducted. This field research took place in an indigenous reserve named Conte Burika, located on the South Western tip of Costa Rica (South of Golfito – see Figure 3 on page 37), bordering Panama. The area is sparsely populated by the rural Guaymi people. The research took place from 26th August 2007 to 28th August 2007.

The research location/project was selected for several reasons:

- Conte Burika houses some of the poorest communities in Costa Rica; in order to judge poverty reducing impacts it seemed sensible to choose an area of poverty to study.
- It is an area in which RI has recently worked in; the most recent project being in early 2007. It was deemed that enough time had passed for the local community to reflect on their experiences of having GYVs in their midst, but not too much time so that they had forgotten key information.
- The author of this dissertation had previously worked with RI as Country Director in Costa Rica. This connection made the logistics, language, and contextual understanding of the relationship with RI and the Guaymi, an easier challenge to overcome. Also the Guaymi did not previously know the author because the project took place after he had left RI; this reduced the dangers of bias, whereby interviewees might comment in a positive manner in order not to offend.

3.1 Costa Rica



Figure 2: Map of Central America
(www.infoplease.com/atlas/centralamerica , 2007)

Costa Rica is located in Central America (see Figure 2), bordering both the Caribbean Sea and the North Pacific Ocean, between Nicaragua (to the North) and Panama (to the South), and has a population of some 4 million (FCO website, 2007). It ranks 48th out of 177 countries rated in the 2004 Human Development Index with only Barbados having a superior rating from countries in the region (UNDP, 2006). Though comparatively wealthy compared to most Latin American countries, by developed-world standards most Costa Ricans would be judged as poor with GDP being US\$4573 per head per annum in 2005 (FCO website, 2007).

Since its independence in 1821, Costa Rica has enjoyed democratic government, the first in Latin America, based on free elections and a multi party system. The government abolished its armed forces in 1948, and has pursued a

philosophy of economic, political and social development. Its two great assets are considered to be its open political system and its relatively inclusive society which has meant less inequality than is apparent over most of Latin America (Wearing, 1993).



Figure 3: Map of Costa Rica (www.mikefarrell.com, 2007)

3.2 Indigenous people of Costa Rica- *Information adapted from internal RI reports written by Staff members who worked with Indigenous people.*

Despite Costa Rica's relative prosperity the indigenous peoples of the land have not fared so well. Today, approximately 9,000 people of the Bribri, Boruca, Guaymi and Cabecar tribes manage to eke out a living from the jungles of remote valleys in the Talamanca Mountains of southern Costa Rica where their ancestors had sought refuge from the Spanish conquistadors. There are currently 22 reserves for eight different indigenous groups. An indication of the discrimination and social exclusion that the indigenous

people have been subjected to is that they only earned their right to vote in 1994.

Although various agencies continue to work to promote education, health, and community development, the peoples' standard of living is appallingly low. Apart from financial and political limitations there are many social problems; alcoholism and more recently, drug-use, have caused further problems for these groups (Information Costa Rica website).

Banana and mining companies have gradually encroached into the remote reserves, buying up land and pushing *campesinos* onto the indigenous peoples' property. Indigenous peoples complain that the National Commission for Indigenous Affairs (CONAI) has proved particularly ineffective in enforcing protections. *"When the moment arrives for CONAI to stand up for the Indian people, they don't dare. They duck down behind their desks and wait for their paychecks to arrive,"* says Boruca Indian leader José Carlos Morales (*ibid*).

3.3 Raleigh International – Information adapted from internal RI documents

RI was established in 1984. It was previously known as Operation Raleigh but was re-launched as RI in 1992 to reflect its international mix. To date it has run some 250 expeditions (programmes) in some 40 different countries.

RI gives young people between 17 and 25 years old and volunteer staff over 25 years old, the chance to live and work on programmes abroad. Not only do they develop new skills and contribute to the country they are working in but they also learn to work together with people from different cultures and backgrounds.

RI currently runs twelve programmes a year. Current programme countries include Namibia, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Malaysia.

A typical RI programme includes volunteers from RI's at-risk programme working

with young people from the UK who are taking gap years or breaks from working or are graduates. They could also be joined by IVs from countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore or United Arab Emirates and young local volunteers from the country they are visiting (whom make up 15% of the expedition content).

During each 10 week long programme all of the young volunteers work on three projects – one community, one environment and one adventure/conservation project. They could end up protecting the biodiversity of a national park by researching its mammals and plants in Costa Rica, building a school in Nicaragua or trekking through mountain ranges in Namibia.

Over 30,000 people from 80 nations have been on a RI expedition and it is estimated that these volunteers have spent over 5 million days working on community, environmental and adventure projects since Raleigh's launch.

All the projects are supported by programme country government ministries, international development organisations like the UN Development Programme and other international charities like SightSavers, World Vision and Save the Children. Many of the projects are funded by international bodies like the European Commission and the United Nations Development Programme.

3.4 The partnership between Indigenous people and Raleigh International in Costa Rica – *Information adapted from internal RI reports*

RI's current programmes in Costa Rica and Nicaragua were launched in October 2001, this followed Operation Raleigh's expedition that came to Costa Rica in 1985. Since 2001 there have been a further 15 programmes (constituting of some 45 community projects), with plans to continue for the foreseeable future.

There has been a continuing commitment to work with the poorest communities within Costa Rica; this has seen RI work with all of the main Indigenous Indian groups i.e. the Bribri, Cabecar, Boruca, and the Guaymi tribes. This partnership

has helped to provide schools, community centres, medical centres, tourist facilities, and clean, fresh water.

3.5 Conte Burika and Raleigh International - *Information adapted from an internal RI report written by Staff members who worked in Conte Burika*

Some 20 years ago there were hardly any inhabitants in this area of primary forest; and the people living there at that time were not indigenous people. The indigenous population had already fled, mainly to Panama, due to threats from non indigenous persons and lack of protection from the Costa Rican Government. But in 1975 the Government became increasingly interested in the plight of indigenous people and began to offer some protection and land. By 1980 the Guaymi had begun a campaign of passive resistance which gained them further rights and land. In 1985 Carona had just one inhabitant, by 1995 the government had helped to build the first school and today there are some 100 people who live in the village of Carona and 200 in the neighbouring village of Alto Guaymi.

Most of the locals are subsistence farmers, with agriculture being the main source of trade and revenue. Maize, rice, plantain, yucca, beans and fruits are the main produce. Other than agriculture, there are not many other employment opportunities in the reserve; a few of the men travel long distances to work on banana or coffee growing plantations.

Access to adequate health care and education has been a significant problem which the community has had to face; decent secondary schooling and further education e.g. universities, are not readily available. Likewise, it has only been in recent years that medical teams have been funded to visit the community a couple of times a year. Before that access to medical services was non-existent, the only option being to walk 22km along the wild (and tide dependant) coastline to Punta Banco, followed by a 2 hour bus journey to the hospital at Golfito.

The partnership with the Guaymi and RI began with a school building project in Alto Guaymi in 2006 (funding provided by the British Embassy) followed by the construction of a community centre (see photo 1, p.71) in Carona in early 2007 (funding provided by RI volunteers).

The 2007 community centre project in Carona was designed to be used by the local people for numerous purposes, including medical appointments and reviews, accommodation for visiting people (such as medics), and educational and cultural awareness talks.

The 2006 Raleigh project consisted of constructing a secondary school with two classrooms and toilet facilities in Alto Guaymi. Prior to this facility being made available the community had to use the primary school (see photo 2, p.71) class rooms on a part time basis to attend the secondary school. Many of the community had been unable to complete a secondary school education because the primary school building was insufficient in size to accommodate everyone; the knock effect of this being that without a secondary school education, a university education and therefore the prospect of higher level jobs with associated wages, was further diminished.

During both of the projects the volunteers lived in the houses of local people (see photos 3 and 4, p.72 for example house and WC), who took them in as part of their family.

The initial objective of the research visit was to interview people from both the villages of Carona and Alto Guaymi, however, the torrential rain made the further one hour trek from Carona to Alto Guaymi unacceptably dangerous. Hence, the research questions focus on the community centre project in Carona, although it should be noted that residents of Carona (see photo 5, p.73) helped in the construction of the secondary school and some now attend that school. Due to this association numerous references to the school project were made during the interviews and have been included as part of the research evidence.

4 Research Fieldwork Methodologies

This chapter presents the research methodologies used, the limitations governing the research conducted, and the findings from the field work. Finally a summary of the research findings is made.

4.1 Research Methodology

This research consists of three components. First, there are eight qualitative interviews with key commentators and stakeholders in the GY sector. Secondly, 15 returned GY staff volunteers from RI programmes answered questionnaires, and finally, 22 qualitative interviews were conducted with a cross section of the people of Carona.

To gain an accurate and in depth understanding of the relationship between volunteers and local communities, would have required in-depth interviews, detailed questionnaires and considerable participant observation to produce the most valid data. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, the resources, in terms of time and money, were not available to conduct such detailed research. However, an attempt has been made to collate a range of views, from a range of stakeholders, to gain as accurate an understanding as is possible given the constraints.

(a) Key commentators within the 'Gap Year'/Volunteer Industry

This group consisted of managers, Directors, and academics that were considered to have significant experience and knowledge of the IV sector – for example, representatives from RI; and academics who have written on the subject area; they made up a very small proportion of the IV sector but it was considered that they would provide a representative cross section of views. Through their insights, a rounded view of the aims, challenges, extent, and overall thinking that exists within the sector was gained. A semi-structured interview was conducted in each of the 8 cases. Structured questions (see

Appendix 2, p.65) were used as a base, and to ensure some consistency, but the interviewees (see Appendix 3, p.66 for list of names) were allowed a certain amount of flexibility to express themselves and to talk about the issues that were important to them. Where deemed appropriate the interviewer was able to explore certain, relevant issues in greater depth.

(b) The community of Carona

22 Semi-structured individual interviews (see Appendix 4, p.67 for interview questions) were carried out with a cross section⁴ of the host community of Carona; this represented some 20% of the community. There was an attempt to engage the 3 people in the community with disabilities, but the President of the village's committee advised that the two individuals with learning disabilities would not be able to sufficiently understand and engage with the research questions, and that the individual who was blind would not be available to be interviewed.

The village of Carona is also seen by the locals as being the 'young' village whereby some 10 years ago young people from Alto Guaymi (the neighbouring village) moved to this area in search of land, hence there appears to be very few people in Carona in excess of 40 years of age; in fact, the majority appear to be children (under 16 years of age).

It should be noted that some interviewees had considerable contact with the GYVs and RI, whilst others may only have had a fleeting interest (see Appendix 5, p.68 for list of interviewee names).

(c) Returned Raleigh International Volunteers

15 questionnaires (see Appendix 6, p.69), asking a range of questions regarding the volunteers' views on the impact their efforts made, were completed by returned volunteers from a mixture of RI expeditions in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. This allowed a comparison to be made between the effectiveness of

⁴ This represented 15 males and 7 females from a community of 100 people. 6 of the respondents were aged between 15-19; 4 between 20-24; 4 between 25-29; 5 between 30-40; and 3 over the age of 40.

different projects in different communities. The 15 people (see Appendix 7, p.70 for list of names) represented some 15% of all RI Staff Volunteers serving on community projects throughout the organisations 8 years of working in the region. Again, semi-structured interviews “*as the dominant research tool*” (Cohen and Manion, 1992, quoted in Simpson, 2004) would have been the preferred medium of questioning but resource limitations required a quicker, more direct method.

4.2 Research Limitations

The research visit to Conte Burika took up a great deal of the research resource in terms of money and time. It was deemed to be appropriate to weight the research heavily towards discovering the views of local people rather than focusing significantly on key commentators and returned volunteers. However, out of a 15 day visit to Costa Rica only three days were spent with the local community, and two days gathering information at RI offices in Turrialba, the remainder of the time was spent travelling. Conte Burika is located in an extremely remote area of Costa Rica; the journey requires long, arduous bus journeys, followed by a 6 hour tide-dependent walk along the beach, crossing fast flowing rivers, and dodging rock slides. The heavy rain during the 15 day stay made the journey even more difficult, and caused delays throughout the visit. The heavy rain also caused a focus group meeting with school children to be cancelled; the children and the teacher being unable to reach the school on the designated day; this was disappointing because it reduced the diversity of the respondents.

It should be noted that the author has a long history with RI, both as a volunteer and as an employee (Country Director for the organisation from 2003 to 2006). On one level this has proved to be an advantage by providing an informed and experienced insight into the areas of study; it has also allowed, through the author’s contacts, access to information within the GY sector; however, on

another level it opens up the author to accusations of bias. The author is fully aware of the dangers associated with this situation and has taken great care to maintain an objective view throughout the research.

Finally, it was decided to conduct all the interviews in Carona in Spanish. The author, who has a competent level of Spanish, asked the questions, and Jorge Cambronero, the interpreter, wrote down the answers; when the day's interviews were completed the Spanish notes were translated into English. It was decided to run all interviews in Spanish in order to make the local people feel comfortable, and in order to keep a natural flow to the conversations. The negative outcome of this was that during interviews, because of the authors less than perfect Spanish and the interpreters less than perfect understanding of the research areas, some important opportunities for follow up questions and further clarification were undoubtedly missed.

4.3 Fieldwork Research Findings

The interviews with key commentators within the GY sector was intended to give a broader picture of the impacts of GYVs on poverty reduction, whilst the questionnaires issued to ex-RI volunteer staff members were intended to give the volunteers perspective on the research question. The reader should be reminded that the volunteer's views are not specific to the Carona project, and represent a perspective from many different RI community projects within both Costa Rica and Nicaragua over the last 8 years.

The research findings will be organised into sub-headings consisting of Laderchi *et al's* four concepts of poverty;

Monetary

Notably, although most returned volunteers commented to the effect that the Pulperia (local shop) *“did a roaring trade in drinks and confectionary for the*

period of our stay”, they put very little importance on the monetary contribution that RI and the volunteers made to the communities in which they worked.

One volunteer added that “I have some doubts as to whether the work we offered compensated for what it cost each household to host us in terms of food and time taken from their own crops. I suspect this varied amongst households, and economically speaking, perhaps for some, our presence created a negative economic impact.”

However, the people of Carona viewed the “*many different*” economic impacts as being “*important*” and “*significant*”; every single respondent mentioned at least three economic benefits from the project. Most respondents talked of the benefit gained from selling Guaymi artifacts (bags, hats, dresses, bracelets), made locally by the women, and it was estimated some \$200 was paid by volunteers for different artifacts during the 10 week period of the project. The female respondents were particularly vocal about this financial aspect of the project; they said that the income was exclusively for them, and that this was the first time that they had been able to gain an income from the sale of their local crafts. There was a real sense of pride from the community that “*foreigners*” were showing an interest in their crafts and culture. The women also talked of the money gained from providing and cooking food for the volunteers (RI paid \$3 per day for each volunteer; some \$3000 throughout the project); volunteers purchased mangoes and bananas (\$100), purchased a pig for \$30, and spent some \$1000 at the Pulperia.

A skilled local builder was employed as foreman for the building of the Community centre (\$250), funded by RI, and out of the \$5000 for materials for the building of the project \$3000 was spent locally to pay for the cutting and provision of the wood; the remaining \$2000 was spent at the nearest local town on materials such as cement, screws, hinges etc;

Local men were paid (\$200) for the use of their horses, and to act as guides, in order that the volunteers could make the 6 hour trek into the village with all of their luggage and equipment.

If the funding spent on wood for the project is included in the calculation then a financial input of some \$8000 was made into the community of Carona. In an area where employment opportunities are limited, and most survive as subsistence farmers this can be considered a significant contribution.

One respondent added that the financial impact could be seen as being sustainable because the Community centre now offered opportunities for the villagers to make money by staging local events which would involve making a profit from the sale of food and drinks, for example.

Julian Olivier, the Country Director for RI in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, said that his budget to spend "*in country*" was £210,000 pa and that about a third of this could be attributed to community projects (planning, administration, transport, tools, fixed costs etc;). RI is currently also operating in Namibia and Malaysia; Julian thought that similar estimates could be made for the money spent on community projects there. In the 8 years of operation in Costa Rica and Nicaragua some £560,000 has been spent in this way; in the 23 year history of RI throughout 40 countries it was estimated that some £5,000,000 could be attributed to spending on community projects. The majority of this money would have been spent locally, but it is difficult to say how much of it would have directly benefited the poor. These estimates do not include the contribution of funders who pay for direct project costs (e.g. materials), or the personal spending of volunteers, before, during, or after an expedition.

Capacity

RI, throughout its existence, has completed some 45 community projects in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, and some 700 worldwide. The majority of these projects serve basic needs of a community; i.e. schools, community centres, medical centres, and water provision (from RI internal reports).

Volunteers were generally positive about the impact of RI projects on poverty reduction through the provision of basic needs (e.g. schools and medical centres); many saw this as a tangible and real benefit that could be contributed. Comments included *“the fresh water supply project could only be seen as a positive impact from a development perspective”* and *“that our impact was positive as we were essentially there to provide manual labour and facilities that they would have struggled to acquire otherwise”*; one even thought that *“apart from the building of the project itself we contributed very little”*. The volunteers saw that RI can help provide facilities that villagers lacked, and help to provide opportunities for improved education and medical care.

Andy Wahid, a previous Country Director for RI, and now working as their Business Development Manager, commented that he *“could take you around Ghana and show you a significant number of schools that RI had constructed, where previously children were taught under a mango tree, where teachers were now making a real difference – that is a significant impact”*.

Clive Inglebury, a Programme Manager for VSO, doubted the impact of a small infrastructure project that a GY organisation might provide; *“building the odd school here and there is all very well, but GY organisations shouldn’t go around claiming to make any significant contribution towards the Millennium Development Goals”*.

The people of Carona all saw the project as benefiting the community, *“it was somewhere for all to enjoy”*; they said that they now had a new facility which was comfortable and could be used for meetings, assemblies, fundraising activities, fiestas, running courses (e.g. sewing), as a medical centre (for visiting medics), a place to stage cultural events, dancing, and as a place for visitors to stay. They saw the project as being *“very important”* to them and something that would not have happened without RI, because *“the government had not helped them in any way”*.

One, Atanacia Flores, added that it *“was like a dream to her that the community now had a centre”*, another commented that *“it looked fantastic and gave the community a certain prowess amongst other communities because they now owned a special building”*; Emiliano remarked that *“before it was just a path with a few mud huts around, now it looks like a village”*.

Many noted that the high school constructed in Alto Guaymi allowed young people to progress to a higher level of education, *“unlike before”*. Education was seen as a means to better jobs and more opportunities.

Participatory Methods

(a) Self-determination and empowerment

Katherine Tubb, from 2way-development, was adamant that GY projects must be ‘demand-led’ responding to what local grass roots organisations require.

Returned volunteers were unanimous that RI contributed to the community’s project; it was not the other way around, *“it was clearly the villager’s project”* said one. The people of Carona also agreed that the community required, owned, led, and managed the project. The Vice-President of the community committee, Pablo, felt that the committee owned the project – they made the key decisions and they decided whether the project was successful or not.

Patricio, the secretary of Carona’s committee, added that he personally gained in confidence from being given the responsibility of organising the provision of food for the volunteers; he said that he’d never done anything like this before, and although it had caused a great deal of worry he now felt proud of his achievements and less fearful of new challenges.

Andy Wahid of RI was keen to point out that RI tries to act as a catalyst leading to the empowerment of others; we give the communities a sense of achievement, *“we don’t want to be a circus show – we work with the communities”* he added,

but David Giles, RI's Operations Manager, worried that at times RI volunteers worked for local people rather than in partnership; there is no lack of opportunity for locals to get involved but sometimes they don't; he was concerned that this could lead to dependency rather than empowerment.

Many of the respondents to the interview questions in Carona talked of having more belief, of being inspired to continue working for the community, having new ideas, being more inquisitive, and of feeling great pride in their achievement. One commented that *"we are better organised, more motivated, and have much better communication; we are much more united and much happier – overall life is better"*.

14 year old Ronaldo said that RI had helped the community achieve a task that before had seemed unachievable; *"the project has been crucial for our development; the villagers now have more energy to make their own dreams and development happen"*. He also commented that seeing volunteers coming from afar had motivated him to become involved in the project.

Indeed, after the first RI project in Alto Guaymi the village worked together to construct a community kitchen in Carona (see photo 6, p.73). This empowering effect was deemed to have spread, with one respondent noting that *"other communities around have seen the success and now believe that they can achieve the same"*.

Julian Olivier of RI, highlighted the communality of the projects as being crucial in having a knock on effect, enabling families to work together for the first time to resolve some of their problems, where before they may have been given something or worked individually. He added that, in Carona they have a very democratic way of organising themselves which has come about from their involvement with RI, *"the experience has been empowering for them and inspiring for me"*.

(b) Increased Efficiency within the Programme

James Davison, an ex-volunteer Deputy Expedition Leader with RI, thought that local people were unable to complete the infrastructure themselves because they had many other family, school, and work commitments; although the project that he worked on was providing essential basic needs (clean, safe drinking water) the local people, he said, saw harvesting crops for example, as a greater and more immediate priority. The provision of labour by the RI volunteers was crucial to the completion of the project. This offer of support by volunteers was hugely appreciated by locals, a factor that really motivated the volunteers to do a good job and complete it on time. Russell Matthews added that *“in an age where slavery is frowned upon, volunteers are a unique source of external free labour”*.

Khanaki Caballero, RI's key contact in Carona, lamented that as the volunteers were unskilled some work was finished to a barely acceptable standard; he said that he would prefer future projects to have volunteers with more skills and experience in order that the construction work was performed to a better standard. He did add that the lack in volunteer skills had been somewhat alleviated through RI employing a local builder to act as foreman for the project

Julian Olivier thought that as RI volunteers had no labour costs it meant that there was more money to spend on materials; donors therefore got more for their money if they worked with RI. Julian added that he'd *“be amazed if any other organisation in the world could match our efficiency – they have to cover labour and admin costs”*. He thought that RI was able to build a school, for example, at half the price that it'd cost the government of Costa Rica.

(c) Mutual Learning

This was an area that returned volunteers, local people, and key commentators had a lot to say about. All recognised that important cultural exchanges took place; people talked of broadening horizons, an enriching experience, and of gaining factual knowledge from the interaction. The people of Carona said that

volunteers learnt about their culture, language, dance, food, the surrounding environment, history and daily way of life. 15 year old Lina said that the social interaction and friendships were much more important to her than the new Community centre.

Julian Olivier of RI told of how volunteers are encouraged to show an interest in a different culture and to ask questions. He believed that this indicated to indigenous people that their culture was important; they are then aware that people from outside are interested in their lives; it makes them have pride; people are interested in what they've got, and this reinforces cultures.

Another volunteer said that the locals were fascinated with the details of western life, and the volunteers in awe of the rudimentary facilities yet positive spirit of the community. One returned volunteer said that *"we talked often about planning and saving and making decisions for the future rather than just the next few months. This is quite a western perspective so I think they found it a useful and interesting alternative to how they currently think, which is in a fairly short term manner"*. However, she added that they were *"on the whole though, our teachers. We learnt more from them I think, than they learnt from us"*.

15 year old Lucas said that meeting foreigners had made him more motivated in his studies; his discussions with the volunteer's medic had encouraged him to want to learn more about biology and the environment; however, he saw his future as being outside the village, where he would get a better education and greater work opportunities. Some returned volunteers saw this impact as having a possible negative effect whereby local people gained an increased awareness of the accessibility of the outside world and a perception that it may be a better place; the concern was that this could deplete the village of its young, gifted residents. A volunteer who worked in Corona noted that some of the teenage Guaymi talked openly at times about dreams to leave the village and explore

work elsewhere; she thought that this was likely reinforced by the group's presence.

The Guaymi were unanimous on the negative effects of the cultural exchange; volunteers' smoking was frowned upon, it was seen as a bad influence on the young of the village, with one teenager saying that he had felt under pressure to join the volunteers in smoking. Other community members mentioned that some female volunteers dressed too briefly – this was deemed as inappropriate in their culture, and a few were offended by volunteers who, on one occasion, paraded on the construction site naked for a *“fun photograph”*. Others saw it as disrespectful that some volunteers did not like the Guaymi food.

Some key commentators and returned volunteers worried about the impact that excessive drinking and drug use by GYVs might have upon a host community that had previously been shielded from these ills.

Many of the Guaymi commented that the community had never worked together before and that the project had taught them how to organise a large group of people to achieve a common goal. The Vice-President of the community, Pablo, said that the experience had encouraged the idea that if you want to learn you can learn and that *“a dream had awakened in his heart to learn English”*. He added that they were now enacting what they had learnt – they were making more effort to organise, unite, and improve.

Wilbert had learnt *“the Importance of punctuality to westerners”* (although it should be noted that he arrived two hours late for his interview appointment!); he was also impressed that RI worked to a tight time scale; this kept people interested, motivated, and excited. He added that his own organisational skills had been improved through having to organise food for volunteers, find housing for them, and sorting out their transport needs.

Clive Inglebury from VSO worries that GYVs may impose their own agendas; they may try and work in a western way and fail to be flexible and adaptable, ignoring local skills and causing conflict. He does, however, feel that GY

programmes can contribute to global education, raising awareness of issues in the development sector, and this may result in citizens in the North being more receptive to poverty issues when choosing a job, giving to charities, or voting in elections. Returned volunteers are more empowered to challenge others negative attitudes; Clive feels that this has to be a good thing, but there has to be follow up, and expectations should be placed on volunteers to get involved and to make a contribution.

Returned volunteers showed enthusiasm for development issues, with one Doctor planning to use her skills in the future to help developing countries, and two other ex-volunteers already working for NGOs in Darfur. Another said that her experience had also made her consider more carefully the governments she would vote for and their international policies.

Another volunteer commented that *“having lived it makes it more real and changes your attitude and behaviours to be more pro-active to try to change the inequalities which exist”*. Others comments included, *“it has reignited my interest in participating”*, another two said that they were considering employment in development work; they saw this desire as having been fuelled by their volunteer experience.

Social Exclusion

Many local people deemed the projects to be inclusive; *“the centre was for all to use, and the school provided the chance for education for all”*. Khanaki, a key member on the local committee, said that the community centre, by providing a medical facility, would enable more support to be given to the blind person within the community.

Several respondents from Carona noted that the financial gains had been *“fairly distributed”* and that the local committee had strived to act fairly by *“selecting people who needed the money more, to provide the services”*; comments were

also made that all of the 10 main families within the village had financially benefited from the project in one way or another.

A 14 year old boy, Ronald, remarked that it was important that people came to help because he made him feel that *“they were part of his community, country, and life”* previously, he said, *“his community had been ignored”*.

The project encouraged *“women, men, young, and old to work together – this stripped people of their egos and united everyone”* said Marvin, who also added that RI gave much more support to the community than the government; the local people had a *“much stronger friendship and relationship with these foreigners than with their own government”*.

There were a few particularly interesting comments from young women; one, Catalina, said that she was motivated by *“by seeing other young women come a very long way to help in her community, and seeing them do men’s work on the building site”* another said that this had motivated her and others to form a women’s group in the village so that they could have a stronger influence over community decisions. However, David Giles, RI’s Operations Manager, saw a potential danger in this, where women were not necessarily empowered but just had their work loads increased as men realised that there were more jobs that the women could do.

One female Project Manager (PM) volunteer felt that she and another female PM suffered from a certain type of exclusion in that the local people tended to liaise with her fellow male staff member; seeing the male as the obvious leader of the volunteers.

Julian Olivier says that nobody at RI says that we aim to work with the poorest of the poor but volunteer opinions and project partner opinions means that we usually do; *“In Costa Rica I have taken the view that I will only work in Indigenous reserves; they live in remote areas that the government have difficulties in operating in; they are poor and marginalised. Most of the people who live in*

towns and cities have access to facilities; the indigenous do not. This is simpler for us, not scatter shot; we can learn of how best to work with the power structures. This is a sector where RI can offer and deliver what is appropriate”.

4.4 Research Summary

The effect of RI's involvement with the community of Carona was, in the opinion of the local people, far from irrelevant; they highlighted benefits relating to all four of Laderchi *et al's* concepts of poverty. The most inspiring comments were those indicating increased empowerment, motivation, unity, and confidence within the community. Although the financial impact of the project was judged to be significant in the eyes of the local people, returned volunteers and the key commentators did not see the financial aspect of GY programmes as being particularly important; also, generally speaking, these two groups did not put such a value on the improved infrastructure that a GY project can provide.

The negative impacts of the GYVs actions were deemed to be limited. It should be noted that RI has had a zero tolerance attitude to drink and drug use on its programmes since 1999; those associated with RI see this as a key factor in maintaining discipline, and showing respect to the communities in which they work. This is not standard practice throughout the GY sector and stories of inappropriate behaviour within communities by volunteers, related to drink and drug use, are unfortunately, not uncommon. However, the research in Carona also showed that some of the actions of RI volunteers can be seen as disrespectful and damaging e.g. smoking and poor dress codes; the GY sector needs to work hard to minimise these effects. There were also some worrying comments that the work that volunteers carry out is sometimes completed at a less than satisfactory standard.

There was general agreement among all three research groups that the cultural exchange had brought mutual learning that had been beneficial to all parties.

Some returned volunteers had embarked on further work within the International Development sector, and others spoke of an increased awareness of the issues associated with poverty, giving weight to the claim that a GYV experience can influence returned volunteers to contribute towards poverty reduction by taking appropriate action long after the volunteer project has finished. This evidence should be taken in the context that the comments came from mature staff volunteers; it can not be assumed that young GYVs would respond in a similar manner.

5. Conclusions

A major outcome of the research undertaken was that the host community of Carona was extremely positive about the benefits of their relationship with RI. The findings would seem to indicate a more positive outcome for the GY sector than the literature review might have expected; it could be concluded that RI is one of the few positive exceptions within the sector, or another conclusion could be that research within this area needs to be much more extensive and certainly needs to focus much more on including the voice of the destination communities, who in this case study, have provided some unexpected and inspirational comments.

Of course, this one case study can not be used as evidence that all GY sector programmes or even all RI projects will be successful. However, it does indicate that with the correct approach groups of GYVs can not just contribute towards poverty reduction but can also provide the International Development sector with an innovative and potentially successful blueprint for working with small, poor, rural communities. Participation of well organised and prepared groups of GY volunteers, working and living beside poor people, can lead to learning, empowerment, increased motivation, and improved confidence levels for local communities; there is something here for the International Development sector to take note of; solidarity in effort and hardship, can galvanise people into greater achievements. Local people appear to respect and value volunteers for the very fact that they participate and act, as Taylor (1997, p.18) pointed out, with a *“generous spirit”* and for *“the common good”*; the host community of Carona would seem to view this as more important to them than a transfer of technical skills.

Overall, the case study showed that GY programmes can make a significant impact to a limited number of people; the sector is clearly not perfect, but the general philosophy of using young, unskilled, short term volunteers in an International Development is a plausible one.

However, the GY sector and RI have a great deal of work to do if they want to provide young people with what could prove to be a crucial bequest towards poverty reduction, namely, a social justice education programme. They need to, as Simpson (2004) so rightly points out, encourage critical reflection in their volunteers, and then, finally, galvanise them into action to challenge inequality and injustice; the sector is currently devoid of any such approach.

Appendix 1 - Key authors

Due to the lack of familiarity of the subject area within the International Development field this section will give a précis of the key authors referred to in the dissertation; this will enable the reader to make a more informed judgement on the evidence and citations used.

Dr. Andrew Jones

Based at the School of Geography, Birkbeck London Jones's research interests in the gap year concentrate on the impact that participation in international volunteer work has on participant's skills and career, as well as the sociological nature of international volunteering. Dr Jones has published the 'Review of Gap Provision' a report commissioned by the DfES, and is active in ongoing gap year research.

Dr .Kate Simpson

Simpson has been working in and researching international volunteering since 1998 and is now based in the Department of Geography, University of Newcastle upon Tyne. Dr Simpson's research interests are focused on international volunteering, and the gap year; she has a number of publications to her name including her PhD thesis. She also manages the 'Ethical Volunteering' website which offers advice and information for people who are interested in international volunteering and want to make sure that what they do is of value to themselves and the people they work with.

Gillian Thomas

She is the founder of 'Telling research' – an organisation that offers analysis and writing fully grounded in the context of public policy and social change. She is the author of numerous research publications looking at cultural change in a range of contexts. She collaborates with a number of other consultants and research organisations (Source: Telling research website).

Gillian carried out research for VSO showing that “International volunteers develop ‘global awareness’ during their time overseas which enables them to think strategically about issues such as diversity and globalisation after returning to work in UK organisations”. The results from her research are contained in the book “Human Traffic”.

Sarah Pink

Pink has a PhD in Social Anthropology from the University of Kent and is a Lecturer at the University of Derby. Her fieldwork has been in Southern Spain, England and most recently in Guinea Bissau. She has several publications to her name; her article, ‘The White Helpers’ in Anthropology Today, used in this paper, seeks to understand the different perspectives of ‘helping’ between different cultures and different individuals. The discussion in her paper is related specifically to one example: her experience of fieldwork in Guinea Bissau where she considers local people's understandings of the roles that rich foreigners play in local culture and society – whether they are anthropologists or development workers – and how local people attempt to gain 'help' from this category of foreigner.

Michael Adams

He carried out research for VSO resulting in a published book covering “The Story of the First Ten Years”.

Laurence Taylor

Taylor was commissioned by the Overseas Development Administration to carry out an independent review and evaluation of the British Volunteer Programme (conducted during 1980/82). The report was presented in May 1982.

Overseas Development Group

This research team from the University of East Anglia presented a report in 1978 stating their views concerning the British Volunteer Programme; the purpose being to assist in the debate on the purpose of volunteering.

Professor Randal Baker

Received his PhD from London University in 1968 and is now a Professor at the School of Public and Environmental affairs in Indiana University. His paper "Volunteering in Development - a Post-modern View" - considers whether volunteers' intentions match their effects in terms of poverty reduction.

Andrew Howes

He wrote an unpublished Ph.D. thesis at Manchester University. His research looked at what he called the "existing tension between an interpretation of the volunteer placement as a tool of technical cooperation for development, and a more holistic understanding of the benefits which such a process can yield."

Michael Palmer

A PhD student at the Australian National University who has published work in The International Journal of Human Rights, International journal of Comparative Sociology, and in Development in Practice. One of his papers looked at the 'pros and cons' of volunteering abroad.

Katherine Tubb

Tubb's MSc thesis puts international volunteering into an international development context, asking questions about how it reproduces historical relationships whilst also offering new, participatory development interventions. She also runs the international volunteering organisation '2 way development'.

Tom Griffin

Griffin completed an MSc in tourism at the University of the West of England, and wrote his thesis on 'A Discourse Analysis of UK Sourced Gap year Overseas Projects'. The thesis considers whether overseas projects carried out via Gap Year programmes meet the needs of the volunteers at the expense of the host communities.

Tom Roberts

Roberts's interests focus on the impact of western volunteers working in developing countries on local communities. His MA thesis asked the question: 'Are Western Volunteers Reproducing and Reconstructing the Legacy of Colonialism in Ghana? An Analysis of the Experiences of Returned Volunteers'.

Appendix 2 – Interview sheet for ‘Key Commentators’

Name
Current role and knowledge/experience in the field of International Volunteering.
How do International Volunteers benefit the communities in which they work?
Do you think that short-term, inexperienced, unskilled volunteers have anything to offer in the field of International Development?
What negative/positive impacts do short-term, inexperienced, unskilled volunteers have on their host communities?
How could short-term international Volunteering be organised in order for communities to receive the maximum benefit?
What do volunteers get out of it? Who benefits more, volunteers or the host communities?
Is it crucial that volunteers spend at least 2 years in a community?
Is it ethically acceptable for organisations to advertise that short-term, inexperienced, unskilled volunteers can ‘make a difference’ in the field of International Development?

Appendix 3 – Names of ‘Key Commentators’

Name	Position	Organisation
Katherine Tubb	Director	2way-development
Clive Inglebury	Programme Manager	VSO
April Pearman	Volunteer Manager	VSO
David Giles	Operations Manager	Raleigh International
Andy Wahid	Manager of Business Development	Raleigh International
Julian Olivier	Country Director in Costa Rica and Nicaragua	Raleigh International
Andrew Nickson	Lecturer. Previously served as a council member for the ‘British Volunteer Programme’	Birmingham University
Brandon Charleston	PHD Student in Cultural Management	Leeds University

Appendix 4 – Interview sheet for citizens of Carona

Name/age
Tell me about your daily tasks, education, family, history within the village etc;
Tell me what you know about Raleigh International?
Why did these volunteers stay in your community? What were they trying to achieve?
What was your contact/relationship with the volunteers? How well did you feel that you knew them?
How did you feel about having these groups of young foreigners in your community?
Do you think that the volunteers learnt anything from you and your community?
Do you think that you or anybody in community learnt anything from the volunteers and the project as a whole?
Do you think that the project could/would have happened without the involvement of Raleigh International?
What were the negative impacts of having the Raleigh International volunteers in your community?
How important do you think the project was to the development of the community? Did the project fit in with any community development plans?
Did the visit of Raleigh International add to the financial well being of you or anybody in the community?
Has your life or the communities lives changed in any significant way because of and since the visits of Raleigh International?

Appendix 5 – Names of Interviewees from Carona

Name	Age	Sex
Marvin	32	Male
Khanaki Caballero	41	Male
Jose Rodriguez Caballero	25	Male
Jose Dominguez	21	Male
Emiliano	33	Male
Elias	22	Male
Alfidio Caballero	23	Male
Zensancio	32	Male
William Cortez	39	Male
Wilbert Atencio Sanchez	25	Male
Pablo	39	Male
Ronald	14	Male
Romon	27	Male
Patricio	28	Male
Lucas	15	Male
Lina Tencio Sanchez	15	Female
Morinu Rodriguez	26	Female
Atanacia Flores Garcia	41	Female
Dona Alicia	44	Female
Efigenia	19	Female
Iris	18	Female
Catalina	19	Female

Appendix 6 - Questionnaire used for RI returned staff

Name/Age
When, where, and why did you volunteer?
Briefly describe the community project that you worked on and your role within it.
Did you and the other volunteers get much chance to work with the local community? How would you describe your group's interaction?
How did you feel you and your project group contributed and integrated with the community?
Do you think that you and the other volunteers made a positive or negative impact in the community that you worked? Please explain your answer.
What do you think the community learned from you?
Did you aid the community's development in terms of providing basic needs (basic needs would consist of building a school, water provision)?
Did you add to the financial well being of the community in any way?
Do you think that your efforts were of particular use to the most marginalised in the community e.g. the elderly, disabled, women etc?
What is your idea of development? Did your time overseas change these views in any way?
Did your volunteer experience raise your awareness of International Development issues? If so, how?
Do you think volunteering helps the development process?

Appendix 7 – Names of returned RI staff

Name	Project / Expedition Country
Jenny Davidson	Nicaragua
James Davidson	Nicaragua and Costa Rica
Emily Peelgrane	Costa Rica
Faye Callaghan	Nicaragua
Hazel Hannant	Costa Rica
Jacky Dale	Nicaragua
Jorge Cambroner	Costa Rica
Luisa Pettigrew	Nicaragua
Paloma Paz Pedroche Iturralde	Nicaragua and Costa Rica
Russell Matthews	Costa Rica
Stephen Flanagan	Nicaragua
Anna Michell	Nicaragua
Victoria Morton	Costa Rica
Emma Palfreyman	Nicaragua
Alex Ford-Rojas	Nicaragua

Photo 1 - Carona community centre



Photo 2 – Primary School



Photos 3 & 4 – Typical house and WC in Carona



Photo 5 – Representatives from Carona



Photo 6 – Community Kitchen



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