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# An Exploration into the Perceived Effects of International Volunteering and Service on Host Communities in the Global South

Katelyn Kerrigan  
klkerrigan@usfca.edu

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**An Exploration into the Perceived Effects of International  
Volunteering and Service on Host Communities in the Global  
South.**

*Host Community Perspectives from the Highlands Village in Viti Levu, Fiji*

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

by

Katelyn Kerrigan

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UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO



*Loud high-pitched voices throughout the village begin to echo the same phrase, “ Yandra Vavalangi” and at that time I know the IVS students are up and walking through the village to the staff house for breakfast. I turn the corner to see a tall white boy, 16 years old with heavy-set red eyes, most likely kava “hung over” from the night before. He sluggishly stomps in his high leather hiking boots down the narrow cement pathway passing Fijian children playing tag in the grass and women in colorful sulus sitting on mats in the open grass, flattening and stacking their dried palms to prepare for a day full of weaving baskets and mats. Everyone is waving to and greeting the 6’2 white American teenage volunteer who stands out like a sore thumb with blonde hair and blue eyes, a neon Quicksilver t-shirt and a bright blue sulu that is falling off his hip, revealing his Nike basketball shorts. He readjusts his backpack gives it his best effort to raise his head, smile, and make eye contact with the local children who are yelling their greetings as he passes...and with that another day in the interior Highlands village of Viti Levu, Fiji has begun.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Presently, we are witnessing an unprecedented expansion of Western youth participating in short-term (1 to 2 week) international volunteering and service (IVS) programs in developing countries located predominantly in the Global South (Lough, 2012; Sherraden et al., 2008). Current academic literature around the impacts IVS has on receiving host communities in developing countries is highly controversial. This study utilizes ethnographic research, involving a combination of participant - observation and semi-structured interviews, to gain the perspectives of the Fijian Highland villagers from the IVS host community, on the positive and negative effects of hosting American (aged 14-18) participating in short-term (one-week) international volunteering and immersion service programs in their village since 1996. The findings from this research suggest that IVS programs utilizing adolescent American volunteers need to distance themselves from a goal of development aid to avoid creating negative outcomes for the IVS host community, resulting in a dependency culture, unsustainable development, and reinforcement of negative Western-culture stereotypes. Conversely, if IVS programs can transition their agenda to focus on a goal of intercultural understanding, where local IVS host community members and volunteers can engage in dialogue and group reflection activities, they will ultimately generate more positive, long- term sustainable benefits for both the community and the volunteers.

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION**

Most of the available research and literature surrounding IVS focuses on the effects these programs' participation has on young Western volunteers. Currently, the effects of IVS on host communities are under-researched and little is known about the short- and long-term social, economic and cultural effects IVS programs and their volunteers have had on host communities (Sherraden et al., 2008). This has resulted in mixed and controversial views of IVS programs. Research shows, while some IVS programs are heavily criticized for supporting Western values, which often promote global inequality and cultural imperialism, others have been highly recognized for successfully improving human conditions and fostering global awareness in their host community (Sherraden et al., 2008; Palacios, 2010; VOSESA, 2011). Presently, the majority of IVS research is focused on the benefits of IVS for volunteers; therefore, we know far less about outcomes and effects of IVS on host communities (Comhlámh, 2006; Lough, 2008).

My primary ethnographic field research in the Highlands IVS host community will specifically focus on exploring and gaining the voices of the underrepresented host community members and offer research-based, effective IVS program models for American teenage volunteer involvement. These recommendations will help to avoid the negative outcomes and current public critiques of IVS programs, which have helped to replicate colonialism models and reinforce a dependency relationship between host communities in the Global South and their Western sending organizations.

A cohesive theoretical framework around IVS has been difficult to establish (McGehee, 2012) and therefore remains largely absent from existing IVS research (Sherraden et. al., 2008). The majority of theoretical perspectives utilized in IVS research, including but not limited to: postmodernism (Mustonen, 2005; Uriely, Reichel, & Ron, 2003), social movement theory (McGehee, 2002; Rootes, 2002), transformative theory (Mezirow, 1996) focus directly on the outcomes and effect of IVS for volunteers.

However, since my research is aimed at finding the effects of IVS for host community members, I have focused my theoretical framework around the varying ideologies of development that IVS programs have formed their mission and goals around, while analyzing their effects on IVS host communities.

The origins of IVS are historically situated within a developmental framework. Research has shown there is no single model of development, but rather there are alternative interpretations of development that are continually shifting over time. Studies have identified IVS programs as multifaceted: While some IVS programs have oriented their program's mission and goals around a need-based, donor-driven charity-development approach, others have shifted their goals and mission toward a human-rights based participatory development approach (Comhlámh, 2006).

The overall outcomes of IVS programs remain highly controversial as a result of the following three integral components of IVS: international volunteering is not an isolated activity, but a historical event situated within in a larger historical and geopolitical context; there is a wide variety of characteristics and goals of each individual program; and lastly, we must consider the historically alternative academic interpretations of what successful development means.

### ***Research Question***

From the perspective of Fijian IVS host community members, what have been the effects of hosting American high school students (aged 14-18) participating in short term (1-week) international volunteering and immersion service programs in their Highland Village over the past 16 years?

### ***Definition of Terms***

**Development:** “Comprehensive economic, social, cultural, and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals” (United Nations *Declaration on the Right to Development*, 1986)

**Gap Year:** A gap year is a period of time, usually between senior year in high school and freshman year in college for Americans, when students take a break from formal education to travel, volunteer, intern or work internationally.

**Global North:** The Global North refers to the 57 countries located in the Northern Hemisphere with high human development that have a Human Development Index above .8 as reported in the 2011 United Nations Development Program Annual Report.

**Global South:** The Global South refers to the 133 countries located in South and Central America, Africa and Asia. It includes both countries with medium human development (88 countries with an HDI less than .8 and greater than .5) and low human development (32 countries with an HDI of less than .5) as reported in the 2011 United Nations Development Program Annual Report.

**Host community:** The community in the destination country that receives and hosts an international volunteer while he/she carries out his/her international voluntary service. For the purposes of this dissertation the Village Highlands, based in Viti Levu, Fiji, is

referenced as the IVS Host Community where I carried out my primary research. The village is made up of 6 clans.

**International volunteering and service (IVS):** IVS programs are highly prevalent and operate in nearly every country of the globe. IVS is a form of civic service. The definition of civic service defined by IVS research Sherraden in (2001) has become the most widely used and accepted definition of international volunteering and service. Sherraden defined civic service or what is now prevalently referred to as IVS as an, “organized period of engagement and contribution to society, organized by public or private organizations, by volunteers who work across an international border, and who receive little or no monetary compensation” (Sherraden 50).

IVS programs are multifaceted and vary along several dimensions. IVS may be public, nonprofit, nongovernmental, or private for-profit. IVS programs usually involve multiple organizations. Minimally, IVS programs normally involve two organizations: a sending organization that sends volunteers overseas; and a receiving organization, which hosts, places, and oversees international volunteers’ service activities (Sherraden et al., 2008). Currently research has proposed two distinguishable major classifications of IVS programs: an international volunteering and service model with the goal of promoting international understanding and an international volunteering and service model, with the goal to provide development aid and humanitarian relief (Smith, 2005).

**International Volunteer:** A person who volunteers in a country other than his/her own (VOSESA, 2011). Given the historical dominance of North-South volunteering, ‘international volunteers’ most frequently refers to volunteers often associated with European and North American countries. For the purpose of this dissertation, the primary

study referenced refers to Americans aged 14-18 who participate in the IVS program carried out in Fiji's Highlands Village.

**Local volunteers:** Individuals who participate voluntarily without direct monetary compensation within their own community, local neighboring communities, or in any community within their country. Their involvement may be regular or irregular, formalized (as part of a program) or informal, and of varied duration. For the purpose of the primary study referenced in this dissertation, local volunteers refer to any Fijian participating in carrying out community service projects in the Highlands Village IVS host community. Frequent reference of local volunteers in my primary study most frequently refers to Fijians volunteering in constructing the new Village Primary School.

**Perception:** The way in which something is regarded, understood, or interpreted (Axford et al., 1997). It is the process of an individual becoming aware and interpreting the world around them. One's perceptions are usually influenced by a combination of one's senses, culture, values, and society at large.

**Sending Organization:** The organization that recruits the international volunteer and coordinates his/her placement in an international host community. The IVS sending organization's headquarters are usually in a developed country located in the Global North where a majority of the international volunteers originate. The sending organization is usually responsible for the overall management and is liable for the international volunteer. IVS sending organizations have a wide variety of missions, which focus on health, education and more generally on issues such as youth development, intercultural learning and charity, to name a few (VOSESA, 2011). Sending organizations can be in the form of agencies, non-profit organizations,

governmental organizations or commercial companies. For the purposes of this dissertation, the IVS sending organization is a for-profit company that operates out of the United States providing volunteers to over 20 countries.

**Underdeveloped:** Refers to Third World countries or developing countries and includes both countries with medium human development with an HDI less than .8 and greater than .5 and low human development (HDI of less than .5) as reported in the United Nations Development Program. Dependency theorists, such as Andre Günder Frank, theorized the underlying factor in economic discrepancy between nations is caused by the historical relationship of capitalism where developed nations were ‘developed’ at the expense of underdeveloped nations through the exploitation of resources and free market trade. In order for underdeveloped countries ‘to develop’, these countries needed to break free from exploitive relationships with the west (Frank, 1966; Willis, 2005).

**Volunteer:** There is little consensus as to what a volunteer is, although it is generally defined as someone who performs a service for the benefit of others with no direct monetary compensation (Cnaan et al., 1996; Palmer 2002; Wilson & Musick, 1998). The UN General Assembly endorsed, as part of the 2001 International Year of Volunteers, the following three criteria for volunteering: actions are carried out freely and without coercion; financial gain is not the main motivating principle; there is a beneficiary other than the volunteer (Devereux, 2008; Dingle et al., 2009; Lee 2006).

### **Definition of Fijian Terms**

**Bula:** The Fijian word for ‘hello’.

**Bure:** Refers to a traditional Fijian’s house made out of all bamboo, straw and wood.

**Cassava:** A popular root crop that is a good source of carbohydrates, but poor source of protein. It is a major staple food, and the basis of the diet for the Highlands Village community who farms their own cassava.

**Kava:** A root crop prevalently grown in the South Pacific. The roots of the plant are used to produce a drink with sedative and anesthetic properties. Kava is an essential part of the life and culture of Fiji and Pacific Islands in general.

**Kua:** The Fijian word for ‘stop.’

**Sevusevu:** An official Fijian ceremony where the village guest presents a bundle of kava roots to the Fijian chief of the village as a means to ask for permission to enter the village.

**Sulu:** The national dress of Fiji, worn by both men and women, resembling a skirt. A sulu is a long piece of rectangular material elaborately decorated with patterns and designs of varying styles, made for both formal and casual wear.

**Taro:** A root crop is a good source of carbohydrates but poor source of protein. It is often referenced as the ‘potato’ of the humid tropics. Taro is frequently farmed in the Highlands Village and is a major staple of the Highlands Village community diet.

**Turagatore:** The Fijian word for elected mayor.

**Vavalangi:** The Fijian word for white man or woman.

## **Demographics of IVS:**

While the demographic profile of domestic volunteers is well known and tracked in the United States, the demographics of international volunteers remains much less descriptive. According to the Center for Social Development (CSD) Research Brief by Benjamin Lough (2012), there were between 800,000 and 1,100,000 individuals who reported volunteering internationally each year from 2004 to 2010. The study found young, white, college graduates with higher incomes, employed, and married people were the most frequent candidates for volunteer service abroad. The majority of international volunteers served with a religious organization. Additional key demographics generated from the study included:

- Considerably more white individuals reported volunteering abroad (87%), compared to those of other racial groups (13%).
- Young Americans aged (15-24 years old) volunteered internationally most frequently (27%).
- Slightly more American women reported volunteering internationally than men (51% and 49% respectively).
- Most frequently American volunteers participate in short-term international volunteer trips.
- 37.5% of the sample population had volunteered internationally for 1 to 2 weeks in comparison to the 8% of the sample population who volunteered for 6-plus months.



## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Research has not kept pace with the growth of international volunteering and service as an emergent international institution (Smith et al., 2005; McBride et. al., 2007; Sherraden et al., 2008). The literature review will explore the limited areas of published research related to the major effects IVS programs has had on IVS host underdeveloped communities located in the Global South. The first section of the literature review will explore the various forms and structures of IVS program models. The second section of the literature review will trace the historical roots of IVS within a development framework and highlight specific micro-level characteristics and relationships of IVS programs that have been perceived to replicate macro-level historical, political and economic global power imbalances and inequalities between the Global North and South. The third and concluding section of the literature review will give an overview of the relatively minimal published academic IVS research that has incorporated the perspective of either the IVS host communities and/or its organization.

### ***Forms and Structure of International Voluntary Service***

IVS is a form of civic service. Civic service is defined by IVS research Sherraden (2001) as an “organized period of engagement and contribution to society by volunteers who work across an international border, in another country or countries. IVS may be sponsored by public or private organizations, it is recognized and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (50).

Avid IVS researchers, Margaret Sherraden, Benjamin Lough, and Amanda McBride, from George Warren Brown School of Social Work and Center for Social Development, Washington University in St. Louis have championed the efforts over the last decade to carryout IVS field research and continue to conduct reviews of IVS studies that have made conceptual and empirical contributions to its field. However, their joint research in 2010 concluded that a majority of the research on IVS only focuses on the effects on the volunteers, while relatively little research has been undertaken to interrogate the perspectives of IVS host communities in a rigorous way; therefore comparatively minimal information is known or understood about what effect IVS has on host organizations and/or host communities (Sherraden et al., 2008).

IVS research carried out by Sherraden et al., (2006) proposed two principle types of IVS: international volunteerism and service (IVS) programs that promote international understanding and international volunteerism and service (IVS) programs that provide development aid and humanitarian relief (Sherraden et al., 2006). Further research has found both of these principle types of IVS can further be distinguished by individual and institutional attributes and capacity (Smith et al., 2005; Lough, 2008; Sherraden et al., 2006; Woods, 1981).

In 2006 Sherraden et al., proposed an IVS typology to explore the varying characteristics and structures of IVS programs and their respective impact and outcomes for host communities. In this study the researchers used eight well-known IVS programs. Four of the IVS programs were designed around the goal of international understanding and four of the IVS programs were designed around the goal of development aid and relief. The study applied ten dimensions of IVS including: funding, duration of service,

number of volunteers/year, number of countries where volunteers serve, age of volunteers, eligibility and participation requirements, inclusiveness, flow of volunteers between countries, degree of international exposure volunteers actually experience to all eight of the IVS programs. Research results that outcomes for host communities, volunteers and sending communities vary depending on individual institutional attributes and capacities.

Specifically, IVS research carried out by Sherraden et al., (2006) was able to successfully categorize and identify specific structures and characteristics of IVS programs, demographics of its volunteer base, and outcomes depending on IVS programs missions and goals. In their research they found IVS programs with the goal of international understanding and service heavily relied on private funding and minimal public funding; had minimal volunteer eligibility requirements; and had substantially less volunteers when compared to IVS programs that have set the goal of developmental aid and humanitarian relief. However, these volunteers are usually younger and only stay for a short time period of less than seven months in the respective IVS host community. Additionally, IVS programs for international understanding typically do not provide a stipend, and often require volunteer fees.

Conversely, the study found IVS programs with the goal of developmental aid and humanitarian relief are funded largely from public sources, require volunteers with professional and technical expertise, and usually recruit older volunteers. These IVS programs associated with the goal of development aid and humanitarian relief operate in substantially more countries where volunteers can serve long-term or short-term placements, but tend to accommodate longer volunteer placements in respective IVS host

communities. Volunteer services tend to be performed by individuals rather than groups. These programs also tend to be unilateral because most are national government initiatives; therefore, their aims tend to be linked to foreign policies. However, a major exception is United Nations Volunteers, whose organization is much broader and encompasses a global mission (Sherraden et al., 2006).

Weaknesses and limitations of the Sherraden et al. (2006) study involved a small sample size, along with broad generalizations and assumptions. Conclusions drawn from the study were over-simplified and downplayed by the complex reality of IVS programs with varying characteristics and dimensions. The research article by Sherraden et al., (2006) failed to acknowledge and reference the overlap and extreme complexity of IVS programs globally; while in reality other significant research has shown IVS programs in the 21st century are no longer as clearly distinguishable with definable goals, characteristics, and outcomes (Devereux, 2010; Lough, 2010; Palacios, 2010).

In 2008, the research paper entitled, *Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Institutional Predictors*, researchers Sherraden, Lough, and McBride used existing IVS research published in English to develop a conceptual IVS model to help further predict the impact and outcomes of IVS programs for both host communities, volunteers and sending communities. However, their conceptual model ultimately suggested there were too many individual varying characteristics and structures of IVS programs in addition to the types of volunteers and their respective attributes and characters; therefore, it was nearly impossible for the researchers to create a specific conceptual IVS model that would maintain accuracy and validity. Sherraden et

al., (2008) concluded their research with the following statement regarding the broad effects and outcomes of varying IVS programs:

*“IVS may positively lead to and create greater cross-cultural competence, including language and communication skills; greater international understanding; enhanced ability to solve conflicts; increased participation in global affairs; and growth of international social networks among ordinary people. In contrast, IVS may do little to improve global relations if it reproduces or reinforces existing inequalities, creates dependency and a ‘new form of colonialism.’ IVS volunteers could hinder economic development by displacing local workers and/or volunteers; mutual aid and self-help could quickly turn into host communities becoming dependent on volunteers. IVS may perpetuate, or even accelerate, the cultural, political, and economic hegemony of ‘First World’ over ‘Third World’ countries at the expense of host communities” (407).*

Research has shown we currently lack a descriptive understanding of how and why particular forms of IVS in different contexts lead to different outcomes and effects for IVS host communities and volunteers (Machin, 2008). However, studies have found that if IVS programs are thoroughly thought out and properly implemented, they can have a beneficial and reciprocal outcome for both volunteers and the beneficiaries of their service (Devereux, 2006).

Numerous IVS research reports and primary studies have concluded IVS has the potential to create more effective and sustainable practices and avoid negative public criticism including the infamous neo-colonialism critique if these programs shift their goals away from focusing efforts around a development model with a Western ideology, referring to economic growth, rapid industrialization, and technological innovation, and refocus their IVS program goal toward on an alternative model of development rooted in participation of beneficiaries in underdeveloped countries, having direct involvement in

project design, implementation and assessment of development projects (Crabtree, 1997; Escobar, 2005; Sherraden et al., 2008; Palacios, 2010).

**Figure 1. Conceptual Model: International Volunteering and Service Impacts**

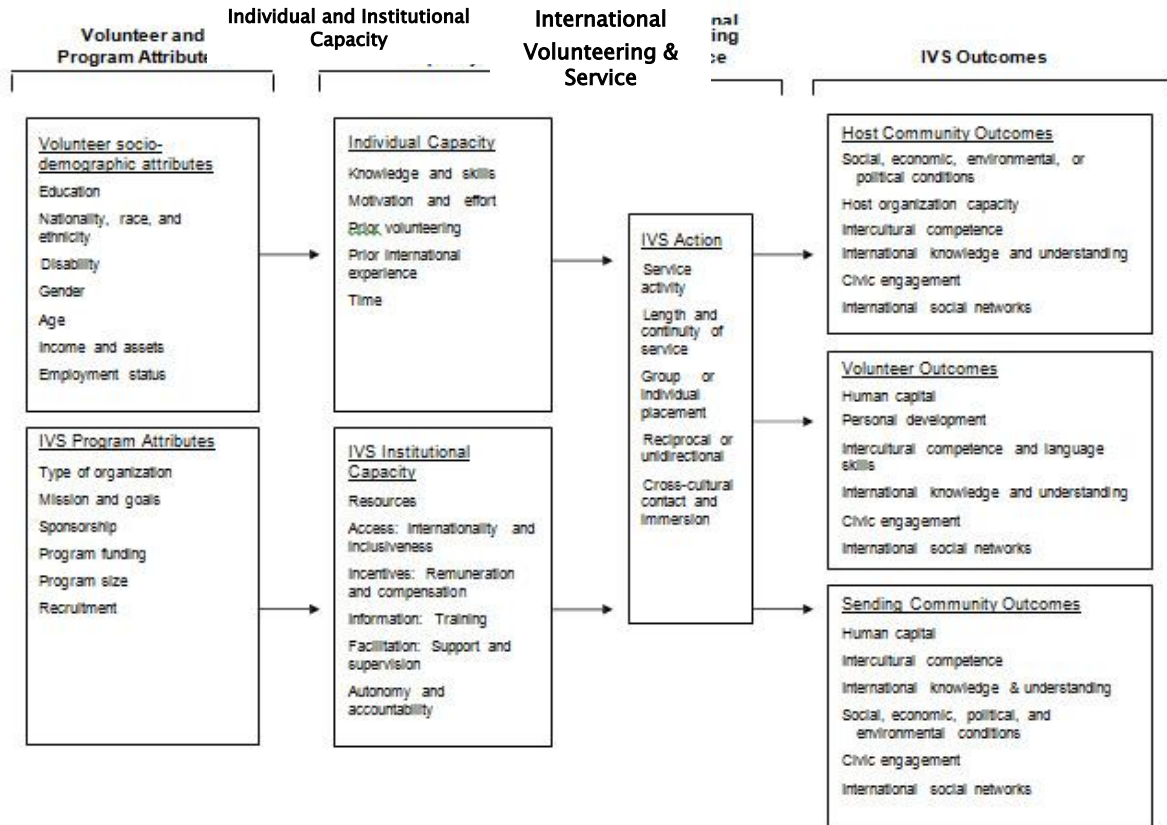


Figure 1: Conceptual Model IVS was taken from research article by Sherraden et al.,(2008) *Effects of International Volunteering and Service: Individual and Instructional Predictors*.

### ***IVS Situated in a Historical Context***

Previous IVS research has reportedly identified international volunteering as not an isolated inter-personal relationship; rather, IVS is situated within larger historical relations and global structures between the Western world and developing world (Smith & Laurie, 2010; VOSESA, 2011). An IVS research report, *International Voluntary*

*Service in SADC*, conducted by VOSESA argues, on a micro-level, IVS programs, international volunteers, and IVS host communities reflect and are informed by multiple global macro-level issues of development, aid, and trade (VOSESA, 2011). However, in order to fully understand and identify IVS within historical global relations it is necessary to trace back to the historical origins of IVS with specific reference to its evolving context within a development discourse.

Historically, the rise of international service was first initiated by European churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the form of missionary work designed to improve local conditions through religious instruction and education in European colonies (Ehrichs, 2002; McBride & Daftary, 2005). Missionary work was carried out by “enlightened” reformers who volunteered to expand Christianity through the deliverance of services to European beneficiaries, with the dual goal of contributing to human development and expanding colonial development (Ehrichs, 2002). In 1864, the first non-missionary IVS program was developed by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to provide medical services on the battlefield during the Civil War (Boissier, 1985; Lough, 2006).

It was not until the 1920s that U.S. first became directly involved in organizing international volunteering for development in the form of work camps to assist in deliverance of international peace efforts and in the reconstruction of sections in Europe that were destroyed in World War I. However, historians and scholars often attribute Western countries’ efforts to participate in IVS post-World War I as a means for national Western governments to remain engaged and control the development of independent colonies (McBride & Daftary, 2004; Rosenstock-Huessy, 1978).

It was not until post-World War II in response to the requests of the United Nations that state-funded IVS organizations really proliferated and begin working toward alleviation of global poverty (Beigbeder, 1991; Bell, 2000; Delano, 1966; McBride & Dafaty, 2005; Pinkau, 1979; Rehnstrom, 2000; Woods, 1981). These nationally created and financially sponsored IVS programs were designed for volunteers to live internationally for a two-year period, volunteering their time delivering technical assistance orientation, addressing international human development, and promoting cross-cultural understanding (Allum, 2007). However, it should be noted some of these IVS organizations were established by state leaders who were ex-administrators of the colonies; therefore, historians attribute these national leaders' motives to be rooted in their desire to regain and maintain control over the newly independent colonies and their resources (Cobbs, 1997). The first significant state-sponsored international volunteer organizations were established by Britain in 1958, followed by Canada in 1959, the United States in 1961, and then Sweden and Japan in 1962.

International service has a rich history in the United States, beginning in 1960s with the boom of young Americans participating in international volunteering and service through the establishment of the government-funded Peace Corps program (Palacios, 2010). According to the U.S. government, the Peace Corps program was established to promote world peace and friendship. However, contrary research has found political leaders of communities that at the same time hosted IVS volunteers perceived the Peace Corps to be rooted in the U.S. governments' political and colonial-like international interventions (Cobbs, 1997). Regardless, since 1961, the creation of the Peace Corps



program has generated a significant increase in the involvement of young Americans participating in international volunteering in over 139 countries (www.peacecorps.gov).

During the 1960s, public literature surrounding IVS practices was significantly swayed by the underlying national political interests and motives of political leaders to send volunteers internationally. However, currently, due to the expansion of the commoditized private volunteer tourism industry, catering to the expansive proliferation of young Western volunteers participating in IVS, there has been a shift of academic literature and current debate surrounding IVS toward a focus on measuring the effectiveness and capability of young Western volunteers to produce beneficial outcomes and effects for underdeveloped communities in the Global South. Current and prevalent public critique of IVS programs replicates the criticism articulated in the conclusion of an article written by Brown & Hall (2008):

*“The use of volunteers who often have little knowledge or experience of the world they are undertaking (an attraction for the volunteers), also calls into question their ineffectiveness and raises the specter of neo-colonialism in the tacit assumption that even ignorant Westerners can improve the lot of the people in the South” (845).*

Additional research has found IVS programs utilizing young Western volunteers often have an overall low developmental impact on IVS host communities since they do not possess sufficient knowledge, reflection capacity, appropriate skills or qualifications (Raymond & Hall, 2008), experience volunteering or traveling internationally (McLeod, 2008) or altruistic intentions (Salazar, 2004). A majority of IVS programs are unidirectional, sending Western volunteers from countries located in the North to IVS host communities in the Global South. Research has suggested that in addition to volunteers’ basic weaknesses, skill, technology transfers, and cross-cultural experiences

also replicate the unidirectional model of IVS volunteers and often do not result in reciprocal transfers (Sherraden et al., 2008). Therefore, IVS researchers have concluded, IVS may perpetuate, or even accelerate, the cultural, political, and economic hegemony of 'First World' over 'Third World' countries to the detriment of host countries (Brav et al., 2002); therefore, replicating and reinforcing macro-level global structure imbalances between countries in the North and South.

However, research has shown if IVS is structured properly it can provide meaningful and long-lasting value to both sending and host communities (Crabtree, 1997; Machin, 2008; Sherraden et al., 2006). Research conducted by VOSESA in 2011, has shown IVS has the potential to provide the space and opportunities for volunteers and host communities to gain better insight into how their countries relate to each other, how current power relations between countries disproportionately work to the benefit of some and the detriment of others, and how international relations impact issues of poverty and development. However, additional critical and systematic IVS research is necessary to provide insight on when and how some forms and structures of IVS contribute to positive and/or negative outcomes and effects for the host community and international volunteers.

### ***Previous Case Studies on Effects of IVS***

In 2008, IVS researcher, Benjamin Lough completed his doctoral dissertation, *Impacts of International Volunteering and Service*. In Chapter 5 of his dissertation he reviews 45 empirical studies on the impacts of IVS. The majority of the studies included were either inconclusive or biased since they were conducted and/or commissioned by IVS-affiliated organizations responsible for sending volunteers internationally. More than

half of these studies focused on the effects of volunteers with only 12 studies focusing on the outcomes for IVS host community members, of which only two were published in peer-reviewed journals.

Lough (2008) concludes in his analysis, “There is little strong evidence regarding the impact of IVS on intended beneficiaries “(83). Additionally, separate research done the same year by Sherraden et al., had similar inconclusive findings and noted, “Due to the wide variety of variable and characteristics across IVS programs, volunteers, and community contexts identifying impacts of IVS programs on host communities have become an extremely challenging endeavor; however, impact studies of IVS host communities are integral to the advancement of effective IVS policy and practices” (400).

Studies done by an Irish organization, Comhlámh (2006) undertook field research within community-based branches of international host organizations in both India and Africa to examine the impacts of international volunteering on host organizations and communities. Primary data was collected through face-to-face interviews with representatives from 12 host organizations in Tanzania and 10 in India and through 4 focus group sessions, with 2 carried out in India and 2 in Tanzania. Secondary data was also collected from a range of sources that included relevant volunteer networks, NGOs and INGO consultants. Research undertaken by Comhlámh found host representatives in Africa and India had a mixed perspective of the IVS host organizations operating in their community. The study found some IVS host organizations identified more positively than others regarding their experiences in hosting international volunteers. The executive summary of Comhlámh’s research included two key interview responses from an IVS

host organization representative in Africa and India, highlighting the varying and controversial perspective on the effects of IVS for host communities.

*“Having volunteers from a different cultural background has always been an enriching mutual learning experience for (our organization). The perspective of people from a different background helps in understanding problems differently, as well as planning strategies in a structured way. Volunteers also bring with them new perspectives and learning.”– Host organization representative, India*

*“Lately, most of the volunteers have been sent to the host countries more to cater for the demand from the public for volunteer placements, rather than actually sending volunteers to address the local needs for development of the host country. This is also giving an opportunity to the volunteers to make it a holiday trip rather than actually contributing to the host country. This has to be discouraged, and hence it should be the responsibility of both the sending organization and the host organization that the volunteers are placed and assigned to appropriate projects with realistic objectives.”-Host organization representative, Tanzania*

Further analysis of interview responses from both Indian and African host organization representatives found the main benefits IVS host communities associated with IVS programs and international volunteers involved skill sharing and improved cultural awareness. Financial resources brought by volunteers were also found to be very beneficial to the development of work outside volunteer programs. Host organizations in both Africa and India identified IVS volunteers lacked significant contribution to the IVS host community due to one or more of the following reasons: language barriers, volunteers’ lack of experience, and volunteers prioritizing short-term tourism over objective service work. Organizations reported 80% of their volunteers were short-term (less than three months) and only 8% of volunteers served more than 12 months. Host organizations reported the majority of volunteers generally came from Europe and North America.

The limitations of this study involved use of non-random sampling techniques and only involved qualitative analysis. No information regarding demographics of volunteers or details on the IVS host community in India and Africa were released in the report summary. Additional limitations of the study involved a relatively small sample size and the voice of host communities was represented largely by the host organization's leader. The study lacked use of a comparison group and did not distinguish the type of IVS program operating in each host community; therefore the study was incapable of comparing and concluding the specific variables of international volunteers and IVS program attributes and capacities that would affect the outcomes for the IVS host communities.

However, a current study conducted by VOSESA (2011), *International Voluntary Service in SADC: Host organizations perspectives from Mozambique and Tanzania*, overcame a limitation of the IVS study conducted by Comhlámh, as VOSESA researchers undertook a comparative case study with a larger sample size. The study conducted by VOSESA was designed to gain the perception of IVS host organizations in Mozambique and Tanzania on the effects of hosting European international volunteers and compare their perceptions of those of host organizations/communities that were involved in similar work but did not utilize or host international volunteers. The study involved a total of 12 organizations in Southern Africa involved in delivering services to impoverished urban and rural communities. Of these 12 organizations, 6 organizations were located in Mozambique and 6 were located in Tanzania. Out of each country's organizations, 3 were host organizations and 3 were comparative organizations.

An analysis of the data collected from VOSESA's (2011) primary study found the relationship between host organizations and international volunteers is largely shaped by the historical relationships of colonialism and neocolonialism, the current global structural injustices and the macro-economic imbalances in trade and political relations between Western world and African countries. Replication of colonial and post-colonial relationships within IVS programs was extremely prevalent in Tanzania, where a majority of the volunteers came from the former colonial master country of Germany. Host organization participants in both Tanzania and Mozambique expressed elevated perceptions of white volunteers coming from the "wealthy Western world with superior skills, access to financial and material resources adding credibility, marketability, and efficiency to host organizations" (55).

Additionally, some respondents from host organizations and communities expressed concerns over the true motives behind volunteers, suggesting that international volunteers arrived to the IVS host community/organization in Southern Africa with hidden agendas in prioritizing their own personal interests. Researchers from VOSESA (2011) attributed these attitudes and perceptions by South African host organizations to have originated from the development history and relationship between Africa and Europe, having manifested in the continual myths of white superiority, and consequently shaped the Southern Africa organization's experience and perspective of hosting international volunteers.

VOSESA's (2011) research found historical imbalances between Western world and African countries reflected through the unidirectional flow of international volunteers from North to South and through the 'supply-driven' nature of IVS programs. Due to the

‘supply-driven’ context of volunteers within IVS programs, host organizations do not receive an opportunity to seek international volunteers with the appropriate skill set they desire as is required for their organization or community’s development. Numerous critics argue, if IVS sending organizations were genuinely interested in IVS host communities’ best interests, principles of reciprocity would be enhanced and a demand-based model would assess and prioritize the needs of host organizations and assign volunteers who meet those specific needs (Leigh, 2005). The study ultimately concluded: “International voluntary service is not an isolated activity, but rather a process embedded within the history of relations between the Western world and the African continent”(11).

VOSESA’s (2011) IVS study placed a solid foundation for future researchers to use in evaluating the effects and impacts of IVS programs on host communities.

However, VOSESA’s study lacked depth and insight due to financial and time constraints, which limited the researchers to only a day and a half to conduct interviews with each South African organization.

Additionally, the VOSESA study is limited to data collection from only IVS host organizations located in Southern Africa. Additional studies are needed to replicate the VOSESA study in other regions of the Global South to evaluate if the micro-level experiences of volunteers and IVS host organizations replicate historical development and geopolitical power imbalances between North and South international relations of development, aid and trade.

Research has not kept pace with the growth of IVS as an emergent international institution (Smith et al., 2005; McBride et al., 2007; Sherraden et al., 2008). Forms of IVS have proliferated and while some IVS programs are being heavily criticized for further

entrenching global inequality and cultural imperialism from the West; other IVS programs have been highly recognized for successfully improving human conditions and fostering global awareness (Lough, 2008; Palacios, 2010). We can no longer assume ‘one size fits all’ in the complex world of volunteering for development (VSO, 2010). Rigorous IVS field research is desperately needed to gain the perspective of IVS host communities as a means to identify the specific IVS models, goals and volunteers’ attributes and capacities that result in the development of more effective and beneficial IVS programs for both the host community and the volunteers.



## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

With nearly one million Americans volunteering internationally (Lough, 2012) and lingering doubts on the effectiveness and impact of young Western volunteers, I found it crucial to gain the knowledge from an ‘inside’ perspective of IVS host community members on the effects of hosting young American volunteers as a means to create a more effective IVS program model with greater, sustainable outcomes for the host community.

My research was aimed at gaining Fijian IVS Highlands Village host community members’ perspective on the effects of hosting young American (aged 14-18) volunteers participating in a short-term (1-week) international volunteering and immersion service program since 1996.

### *Setting*

*“Access is not something that happens before and outside the research but is part of research process.”(Atkinson 43).*

Considering that most IVS programs flow unilaterally from North to South (Palacios, 2010), with 800,000 to 1,100,000 American individual participants, most frequently ages 15-24, participating in IVS for only short-term periods (1 to 2 weeks) of time (Lough, 2012), it was only logical for me to research an IVS company operating out of United States and sending teenage American volunteers for 1 to 2 weeks to an IVS host community located in the Global South.

In March 2012, I began my endeavor to gain access into an IVS host community where I could carry out my ethnographic field research. I was very fortunate for my connection to an American IVS sending company, whom I was previously employed by,

for their willingness in allowing me the freedom and permission to carry out my ethnographic research in a rural host community located remotely in the interior Highlands of Viti Levu, Fiji, where they have sent small groups of American volunteers (aged 4-18) for short-term volunteer service and immersion experience since 1996.

It is important to note, that I had aspired to carry out a comparative study between two IVS host communities in the Global South as a means to increase the validity of my study and demonstrate that the findings were not exclusive to a particular country. However, all nine of the IVS organizations I contacted declined to give me information on the host communities they worked with and/or denied my participation in their IVS program as an ethnographic researcher. Two of the organizations replied that they would only begin to consider my request to carry out ethnographic research in the IVS host community if I paid their one-week volunteer fee of \$400 minimum, not including airfare.

### ***Study Design***

IVS involves three key players in the actual volunteering experience: the sending organization, the host community, and the volunteer (VOSESA, 2011). My research deliberately focuses on gaining the perspective of IVS host community, whose voices have been previously silenced and marginalized in the majority of IVS research.

My primary research was undertaken using a qualitative case-design method utilizing ethnographic research involving a combination of participant-observation and face to face semi-structured interviews. As a participant-observer in the Highlands Village, I closely identified and carried out the role of a participant-observer as defined by DeWalt & DeWalt (2002): “The researcher is a member of the group being studied,

and the group is aware of the research activity. In this stance, the researcher is a participant in the group who is observing others and who is interested more in observing than in participating, as his/her participation is a given, since he/she is a member of the group” (24).

Throughout my experiences as participant-observer, my first priority was to my research, remaining as neutral as possible in all IVS activities. However, occasionally I did directly participate in hands-on service when requested by IVS staff or American volunteers. I also did share in meals with the American volunteers and IVS staff and joined in the volunteers’ scheduled evening activities. Observations and insights from my participant observation were recorded daily in my research journal.

Significant insight was provided for my research through participant observation; however, it was through face-to-face interviews I was able to effectively gain a variety of in-depth perspectives on the effects of IVS for the Village host community. I found it crucial to use interviews in my research, not only as a means to collect more detailed and accurate data, but also for the benefit of the interview participants to gain more understanding of IVS and its effects on their community. As previous ethnographic researchers, Dewalt & Dewalt, (2002) experienced and concluded, participation in research interviews encourages interview participants to understand their personal experiences in a broader context, “the interview becomes more than a data-gathering technique: it is part of a process of building understanding and relationships and can be seen as providing a service itself” (78).

Purposive sampling was used as I aimed to gain the perspective of staff from IVS sending agency and the Village Chief. In addition, I used convenience sampling based on

the availability and willingness of Highland Village community leaders and members to voluntarily participate in a face to face interview. There was one instance of snowballing when an interviewee introduced me to another Fijian villager who voluntarily agreed to participate in a face to face interview. The 7 Fijian community members who participated in one-on-one interviews voluntarily participated in my study. I was very upfront and clear in my recruitment of local Fijian research participants that interview responses would be fully voluntary and confidential; I guaranteed I would put my utmost effort forth to protect their identity and prevent their participation from interfering or directly resulting in any negative effects in their relationship with the IVS sending organization or with other community members.

During my ethnographic research on the island of Viti Levu, Fiji I conducted 14 interviews, composed of face-to-face interviews with the following voluntary participants: the Village Chief; 4 Fijian staff employed by the IVS American sending company (3 of whom were born and raised in the IVS host village and one whom lived in a neighboring village); 7 Fijian community members who were born and raised in the village, one American staff employed by IVS sending company who worked for 6 weeks leading service trips in the Highlands Village; and full-time Director from IVS sending company.

Interviews were semi-structured and followed a general guideline of addressing three key topics of IVS including, but not limited to: the history and evolving structure of IVS in the village; the positive and negative effects of IVS for the village community members; and the outcomes of IVS for the village and its community members. Since

English is one of Fiji's three national languages, all interviews were carried out in English and ranged from a half -hour to 45 minutes in length.

Great precaution was taken to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of all research participants, the IVS sending company, as well as the IVS host community and its specific location. I took extreme precaution to mitigate potential risks that would pose a threat to interview participants or the IVS sending organization. I strived to ensure complete anonymity by coding all interview participants with a random identification numbering system and using pseudonym names to preserve the identity of both the IVS sending agency and the IVS host community. Neither individual identities nor the specific name of the IVS sending organization or IVS host community were ever used in any reports or publications. Confidentiality was maintained and upheld at all times as I kept all audio recorded and written data locked in my suitcase while conducting my field-research in Fiji. Upon returning to the U.S I transferred all confidential written research information to a personal filing cabinet

After each interview session I transcribed the audio recorded narrative data and created a primitive classification system to distinguish and separate the positive versus the negative effects of IVS programs that interviewees had shared. As my data accumulated, I continually reexamined interview responses and my participant-observation findings to locate emerging themes, specifically with regards to the attributes and capacities of the American volunteers, specific elements of the IVS program model, and the participation of villagers in IVS activities and their interactions with American volunteers. As a precaution, after I transcribed the interviews I immediately erased the

audio recording from my personal recorder and kept one copy of the recorded interview locked in audio file on my personal laptop.

### *Limitations*

There are obvious limitations in conducting a qualitative study, with one case study, in a specific geographic location, that uses a small, non-random sampling. Research will not be representative of all the IVS cases; however, the IVS program in this case study replicates variables that are highly prevalent in IVS programs. The Highlands Village IVS program in my primary study carried out in Fiji resembles numerous other IVS programs that send Americans (14-18 years of age) to developing countries to participate in hands-on service and immersion experience. However, as prior research has shown, IVS varies along several dimensions, including but not limited to: nature of service, duration of service, demographic of volunteers, degree of internationality, and location of the IVS host community (Sherraden et al., 2006). Therefore, I do not seek to generalize my research findings to all IVS programs involving the participation of American teenage international volunteers globally; rather, I present the testimonies generated in my one-on-one interviews in addition to the key findings of my participant-observations and analyze the congruency in my primary research findings to previous IVS research as a means to help identify broad emerging trends and themes that may provide insight into when and how some forms and structures of IVS positively or negatively affect IVS host communities.

It must be acknowledged that my overlapping identity as a researcher and previous employee of the IVS sending organization created conflicting identities for myself that could have affected the honesty in the responses I received from interviewees.

However, on the contrary, my prior seasonal employment with the American IVS sending agency over the last four years has given me the opportunity to form close friendships with numerous local Fijian villagers and both American and Fijian IVS staff. Therefore, my previous involvement as an employee of the IVS sending company conversely could have positively affected my research endeavors and generated more detailed and truthful responses from interview participants.

Another limitation was the amount of time I had in the field. Limited resources constrained my research to a 3-week period in the Highlands village. More time and resources could have increased the number of interviews undertaken. Additionally, USF's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) prohibited me from interviewing American 14 to 18 year-old volunteers; therefore, I was not able to directly gain the perspective of the American volunteer to build a fuller and more complete picture for my case study.

### ***Project Overview***

The IVS host community in Fiji where I carried out my research is home to around 500 indigenous Fijians and located in a rural village within the interior Highlands on the island of Viti Levu. The village is situated about one and half hour from the nearest town in a very remote location with limited access to basic services. There is no running electricity in the village, with the majority of light supplied by flashlights and lanterns. However, the village does own a generator, making electricity accessible to a few houses for a couple of hours per week. Prior to the presence of the American IVS sending company, the Highlands Village had very minimal access to any basic services.

The American IVS teen travel and service company has been sending volunteers and working to help develop the Fijian Highlands Village since 1996. The IVS sending agency provides the opportunity for American high school students, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years of age, to live with a local Fijian host family and participate in 30 hours of community service in the Highlands Village. American volunteers arrive in small groups to Fiji on a weekly basis for 10 consecutive weeks from June until mid-August. During the remaining 9 months of the year, the American IVS agency arranges for only a small group of gap year students, to stay in the village and volunteer for one to two weeks per month. The type and number of volunteers the IVS host community receives has always been controlled by the IVS sending agency, with the host community not being directly involved in the selection. There are very minimal specific qualifications or eligibility requirements, except for age (14-18) and a mandatory volunteer fee for IVS participants.

According to one of the Directors of American IVS sending agency, the American IVS sending organization has a multifaceted mission of working to benefit the communities they send American students to, the student volunteers themselves, and their staff. Their IVS programs have the dual goal of delivering development aid and intercultural understanding and have incorporated a participatory development style. The following interview response was given by one of the Directors of the IVS sending agency:

*“The village always determines the projects. We (the host community council members and IVS sending organization’s staff) have a village meeting for the summer to get a sense of the amount of resources available to them and then they determine and choose the project. Additionally, we put a lot of time and energy into employing members of the village and getting them to become leaders for our organization.”*



IVS host community members have recognized the IVS sending agency's effort to be respectful of the villagers and their cultural practices. The following statement is part of an interview response that was given by an elderly Fijian villager when I asked if hosting American volunteers has had any effects on their Village's cultural practices:

*"The good thing I first saw when they (IVS sending agency) came to our village, they present the kava to the chief, which is part of the culture here. When they come here they want to learn the culture to experience it. So then they come and ask questions what they (IVS sending company) should do so they can be able to stay here and be part of our village community. So from that time they keep talking to the elders and Chief and so everything keeps going on between the elders, the Chief, and the community with the company and the students."*

*–IVS Fijian Staff #2*

The American IVS sending organization employs a combination of local Fijian and American staff. In the Highlands Village, there were 3 local Highlands Village staff members and one American staff member working full time facilitating small groups (5-10 individuals per week) of American volunteers (aged 14-18) participating in the one-week service immersion trip. The American volunteers pay the U.S. IVS sending company \$1,600 to cover their housing, food, tours, activities and certain admission fees that have been pre-specified in their trip itinerary for the week they are in Fiji. Domestic and international airfare is a separate fee and is also handled through the American IVS sending company.

The American IVS sending organization provides no direct formal monetary compensation to the Fijian Highlands Village for hosting the volunteers. Rather, the American IVS sending company completely funds the development projects to be carried out in the village with the help of the volunteers. Additionally, the American IVS sending agency provides a large, pre-set annual monetary donation to the Highlands' community

for their annual village fundraiser and requests for volunteers to bring gifts for their host families.

During the 10-week session, from June to August 2012, the U.S. sending origination sent over 76 American volunteers aged 14-18 to carry out community service projects and live in the village.

### ***Context of IVS***

With no government funding or external financial assistance being offered to the Highlands Village prior to 1996, the American IVS sending agency presented the ideal opportunity for the Village to fulfill their immediate financial 'needs' to mobilize resources to carry out development projects. The relationship was equally beneficial in fulfilling the American IVS sending organization's 'needs' in providing an ideal traditional Fijian community in an exotic remote-but-safe jungle location where they could commoditize and sell an international 'feel good' volunteer experience for adolescent American volunteers. Additionally, the IVS experience in the Highlands Village fulfilled the volunteers' 'need' to earn recognition in fulfilling community service hours, thus providing direct personal academic and career-advancement benefits for the volunteer.

Since 1996, the American IVS sending agency has funded a variety of development projects carried out by both American and Fijian village volunteers, including but are not limited to: repairing the church minister's house; installation of water tanks; retiling the church floor; building a fence around the entire community to keep wild animals out; constructing walkways throughout the village; building

community bathrooms; installing community water taps; building a kindergarten; fixing numerous local houses.

Currently agency volunteers are involved in the process of helping to build a primary school in the village. In 2011, the American IVS sending agency officially agreed to fund the materials for the primary school to be built through a combined effort of local Fijian and American volunteers. Formerly, village children would walk 45 minutes through the jungle, zigzagging back and forth, crossing the river 9 times, to get to the neighboring elementary school where they would board Monday through Friday and return to their village on the weekend. The hope is with a primary school in the village, everyday school attendance rates will increase. The expected completion date for the new village Primary School building is mid-2013.

The relationship between the American IVS sending organization and Highlands Village was -- and continues to be -- established on the underlying motivation of both parties, and is rooted in their individual/institutional endeavors to fulfill each of their own respective 'needs.' Interview responses from host community members indicated Fijian villagers believed resource mobilization and capital accumulation was the greatest benefit of hosting American volunteers in their village. However, research has shown resource mobilization and monetary contributions that inhibit local self-reliance, and the provision of human resources are unsustainable over the long-term and have the potential to create a "dependency culture" (Comhlámh, 2006).

Previous research has shown, IVS is not an isolated activity but rather exists in a historical development framework (VOSESA, 2011). My research supports these findings as my primary study found the overall relationship between the American IVS

sending agency and Fijian host community to be replicating the largely imbalanced historical global relationship of power and development between Northern countries and the Global South. Specifically, the structural components of the IVS program carried out in Fiji's Highlands Village, combined with the 'supply-driven' nature of international volunteers, and the underlying motives of both the IVS sending agency and IVS host community to form a relationship as a means to fulfill their 'needs,' has resulted in a dependency relationship, as the Highlands host community has become overly reliant on the capital accumulation and resource mobilization provided by the IVS program. The current structure of the IVS program in Fiji's Highlands Village, in utilizing American volunteers to carry out hands-on service and deliver development aid, is ultimately not offering a sustainable response to address the underlying root problem of Fiji's Highlands Village remaining underdeveloped.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA FINDINGS & ANALYSIS FROM INTERVIEW RESPONSES**

Overall, the host community's respondents expressed positive perceptions of hosting American volunteers in their village. Interview responses from the Fijian villagers highlighted resource mobilization and capital accumulation, cultural exchange, and language proficiency as the three most positive effects of hosting American volunteers. However, responses also seemed to highlight the negative outcomes of the IVS program including, but not limited to, the villagers' dependency upon the volunteers' ability to donate gifts and money, as well as detriments to their younger generation, which was quickly absorbing Western cultural values.

#### ***Resource Mobilization & Capital Accumulation***

A majority of interview responses indicated a majority of Fijian villagers perceived the main aim of the American IVS agency was to help develop the Highlands Village. A majority of interview responses from Fijian villagers perceived the most positive effect in hosting American volunteers is their ability to generate the necessary financial support to mobilize resources for community's development projects. The following interview responses from Fijian villagers expresses their appreciation for the development projects the IVS sending organization and volunteers have financed and built over the past 16 years.

*“The reason for accepting the kids (volunteers) coming into the village is the things they brought-- the development. They have and continue to develop this village into a better standard.” - Village Chief*

*“We are happy to have the students (volunteers) for the things they bring and the projects they do, which has allowed for an upgraded life.” -Fijian Respondent #5*

*“Before, when it was raining for so many months, there would be mud everywhere in the village because it is so flat, but now that the students came and did the walkways in the village it makes it possible to go around the village when there is heavy rain. Also, thanks for the fence around the village, now the animals can’t come in. Also, we are so happy for the other projects the students do, like the church minister house, the bathrooms, kindergarten, now the school -- and for all the donations the students bring to their host families.”-Fijian Respondent #4*

### ***Cultural Exchange***

The cultural exchange that occurs between American volunteers and Highlands villagers was the second most frequently stated positive effect of the IVS program. The following interview responses from Fijian villagers highlights the various forms of cultural exchange between American volunteers and Fijian villagers that have transpired over the past 16 years:

*“Before I did not know about Vavalangi and their different life and cultures. It is good when they come to our village and it makes us learn to understand other people’s cultures and ideas and lifestyles. The good thing about Vavalangis coming was it helped me create understanding of the other worlds and what we may have one day in the future here in the village.” – Fijian Respondent #3*

In the following interview response, the Village Chief expands on highlighting the positive effect of the global network that has been created as a result of hosting American volunteers:

*“It is good to have American student volunteers here because it is a way the people here can learn more new things and understand new cultures and new ways of being. The good thing in having the students here in the village is the relationship becomes extended wide. Not only in this village, but across to another corner of the world. When the American kids are here our family has been extended twice as much. That is a very good thing. I believe is it is a blessing to us. Before, when the Americans were not here, we only had a relationship locally that just continued to spin only around Fiji. But as soon as the Americans stepped down into our village in Fiji, then our family was extended across the globe to the other corner of the world.” –Village Chief*

In the following interview response, a Fijian employee of the American IVS company points out how the volunteers have helped Fijian villagers gain new life perspectives by actively encouraging Fijian children to be more outgoing and courageous:

*“My community, the Fijian community and culture, one thing they lack is courage. But when the students come here they help to have that open conversation. By having Americans here it helps people in the community get a lot of perspectives and views from other people and that helps the people, especially the children, to speak openly and to ask questions.”*  
-Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #3

In another interview response, a village elder highlights the positive effect of the volunteers’ arrival, as it helps to reinforce traditional Fijian welcoming ceremonies:

*“It is good when the Vavalangis come because it reinforces important parts of culture like the sevusevu kava ceremony. Our ancestors did it to show respect and welcome visitors and now we keep doing it to show respect to the Vavalangis when they enter our village. The best way to learn how to do sevusevu is to watch it happen. When the Vavalangi students come I can send my son to the staff house or the chief house and he can watch and learn how sevusevu is done. It is good that we are keeping our traditions alive and my son can watch it be done so one day he will be able to continue with sevusevu and show his children the tradition of sevusevu and kava, which is very important since it is through these traditions we show respect to God and our visitors.”* - Fijian Respondent #5

### ***English Language Skills***

Learning, practicing and hearing English being spoken regularly by American volunteers in the Highlands Village was the third most frequently stated interview response given by villagers, regarding the most positive effect in hosting American volunteers in their community. Since villagers living in the Highlands do not have access to internet, television, radio or newspapers, it is ultimately the interactions with the American volunteers and IVS Western staff that allow their children to learn and improve their English language skills. In the following interview responses, the village primary

school teacher and a Fijian community elder highlight how hosting American volunteers in the village has helped villagers develop stronger English communication skills:

*“Our school is in the interior Highlands and we have no TV. It is good to have the American students come to teach in our school and help my students develop more English.” - Fijian Respondent # 1*

*“The guys in the Highlands are going around and hanging out with the students during the 10 weeks and so they learn more English vocabulary and are improving their English just by talking and interacting with Vavalangis. Even students from other villages who went up to a high level of education don’t have as good of English as some of the boys from this village who left school and are now farmers, but have very good English because they spent so much time hanging out and talking with Vavalangis.” -- Fijian Respondent #4*

The ability to communicate in English is an extremely valuable skill for a Fijian.

Due to Fiji’s large tourism industry, English is the language of employment in Fiji. As a Fijian employee of the IVS sending organization stated in his interview:

*“English is the best thing about the projects – English language exchange is very beneficial for the villagers.”—Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4*

### ***Cultural Misunderstandings***

Overall, the Village Host community members and leaders were very thankful and appreciative of the American IVS sending agency and American volunteers for their involvement in the village and its development. However, there were a fair number of criticisms and negative effects expressed by local Fijian villagers, specifically regarding cultural misunderstandings due to poor communication between IVS staff, volunteers and local Fijian community members.

To avoid future cultural misunderstanding, Highland villagers strongly advocated for the IVS sending agency to create a stronger pre-departure written orientation



including a more detailed dress code and explicit behavior guidelines for the volunteers to follow while living and carrying out community service in the Highlands Village.

A majority of the village interview participants voiced similar criticisms and frustrations relating to cultural disrespect, as represented in the interview responses stated below:

*“You never see girls in the village wearing swim suits and swimming or bathing in the middle of the river. It is very hard for us to see Vavalangis girls doing that. Here in the village we believe that even when you go in the river to bathe, women need to stay covered up with your sulu. I know things like this are probably going to change soon here with village girls starting to wear bathing suits in the river, but it’s very hard for me to watch it happen now and I don’t want it to see our tradition and culture changed so fast.”-Fijian Respondent #5*

In another interview response, a Fijian villager voiced a complaint that resembled numerous other villagers’ interview responses regarding their common frustrations in not knowing how to effectively and respectfully communicate with American volunteers about culturally sensitive issues:

*“Students (volunteers) sometimes disrespect our culture and it’s hard for me or other people in village to say something since I just don’t understand how to tell Vavalangis in a good respectful way so they don’t get angry or sad. What I am seeing and want to talk to American volunteers about is their behavior, like standing inside or around a kava circle or bathing and swimming in only their swimsuit in river. I do understand our culture and their culture are very different, but I don’t want them to take away things from our culture because they are not practicing it in America. It’s important also because then the Fijians in my community, especially the children and teenagers, will think it’s okay to do it and they will begin to think the volunteers’ way is better than our ways here in the village.”-Fijian Respondent #2*

Various interview responses from villagers expressed a strong desire for the American IVS sending agency to provide training for Fijian villagers on effective and respectful communication techniques to use that would allow for more effective dialogue

relating to these culturally sensitive issues. In the following interview statement, a Fijian IVS staff member expressed frustration with the American IVS sending agency's unrealistic expectation of him to have a clear understanding of American culture:

*“They (American IVS sending agency) have always had a high expectation for me to already know about American culture and what these kids (American teenage volunteers) have back home-- but during my first years I didn't. It was very hard, it would have help a lot if we (Fijian staff) were told and given a clearer understanding of the students' cultures and their expectations of the village and of us as staff. Even after working with these students for many years, I still struggle to try and find a balance between our two cultures and how I can communicate messages about our culture more clearly to the students.”*  
--Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #3

### ***Communication Failures***

Poor and minimal direct communication between IVS staff, American volunteers, the IVS sending agency, and individual host community members has also led to perpetual cultural misunderstandings occurring in the Highlands Village. Cultural misunderstandings between all parties involved in carrying out the IVS program in the village could be eliminated in the future if the American IVS sending organization spent more time and resources in areas of monitoring and evaluating the programs and their effects on host communities and volunteers.

In the following interview response, a local IVS staff member employed by the American IVS sending agency highlights how continual misunderstanding and lack of communication between IVS staff, village locals, and American volunteers has caused the number local Fijian villagers participating in community service projects with American volunteers in the Highlands Village to decrease over the years:

*“I think misunderstanding and poor communication is the reason why most of the people (local villagers) don't think that the students (American volunteers) want*

*or need their help in building projects in the village. Some staff keeps on telling them (the villagers) these students have to work because they have to do it for their school, but the (villagers) don't understand that these students still need their help and can't do all of the building projects by themselves. For example, they (villagers) should help the students (American volunteers) in carrying the heavy building materials. I think it is just a misunderstanding and no one talking about what the villagers need to do to help the students.”--Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4*

### ***Volunteers' Lack of Experience***

All Fijian staff employed by the sending agency based their negative perceptions of the IVS program specifically on their personal experiences managing and working with American volunteers on building projects in the village.

The following interview response given by a Fijian IVS employee resembles the other three interview responses of Fijian IVS staff regarding the negative effects of working with American volunteers on service construction projects in the village:

*“It is hard to work with the students when they don't have the experience in doing construction work. With no experience you don't know how to do something and you probably are going to need a lot of time to learn how to do it. Sometimes the projects turn out good, but sometimes they get ruined and that is not good when we keep wasting more time, money and materials. I see mistakes in projects because these students are young and they are not used to doing work like this.”  
- Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4*

Because of the age of the American volunteers (14 to 18), most have not yet fully developed a specific skill set. The following interview response given by a Fijian IVS employee voices his preference to work with skilled volunteers:

*“I find it hard to work with the students (volunteers) sometimes. I mean, you tell them over and over how to do things, but they don't know how to do it. I mean it is really mostly in construction. It would be easier and better to work with someone who has skills when doing construction projects. You know when you spend money on something, it makes sense to use those resources and materials*

*wisely, but this does not always happen. Many mistakes are made by the kids (American volunteers) doing construction.”- Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #5*

### ***Increased Expectations of Host Families***

In addition to the negative effects voiced by Fijian IVS employees regarding working with young and unskilled American volunteers on construction projects, Fijian IVS employees also frequently expressed concerns over the increasing expectations that host families had on the quantity of gifts they anticipated receiving from the Americans they were to host.

It is important to re-mention that host families are not directly financially compensated by the American IVS sending organization. Rather, the IVS sending organization gives a list of suggested gifts (towels, notebooks, shoes, toiletries, t-shirts, blankets etc.) to the volunteers to bring to their host family. However, in the statement below, a Fijian IVS staff member’s comments bring to light the negative effect that these gifts can have due to increased expectations of, and jealousy between, the Fijian host families.

*“Now many families come to me and want students to stay with them because of the stuff they hope a student will give to their family at the end of the week. That is bad because when you start to expect something, then you know every year the expectation is going to go up... I have seen over the last few years, students bringing different gifts for their host family. [This] has been creating more tension and higher expectations to receive more expensive gifts from the students. I see the people in the village are starting to get more jealous because some students get very close to their family and they return the next year bringing more gifts, including money. I really try to discourage that, but you know... there is nothing I can really do.” - Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #3*

In the following interview response, another Fijian employed by the American IVS sending agency expressed concerns regarding the IVS sending agency’s current gift-giving policy:

*“We have good American student volunteers come to the village and it makes me feel sad when the host families keep expecting more from them. I don’t understand how those host families didn’t understand students are not all the same. Many of them (villagers) think that everyone in America has many things and costly things. I see people here start to become really greedy these last years. I don’t understand. Before, this was not happening. We used to share, but now it’s different and it makes me sad. I know this is bad and should not be happening.”*  
-Fijian Respondent #3

The magnitude of interview responses highlighting the negative effects of host family gifts led me to ask how the current situation could be improved to lower expectations and tensions between the villagers. One Fijians employed by the American IVS sending agency offered the following solution in his interview response:

*“Since there are different students coming to this village from different family backgrounds, staying with different host families and giving different gifts, there are just too many differences. We need to set strict rules for students and the gifts.”* - Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #2

I will conclude this section on the negative effects the IVS program has had in Fiji with this response from a Fijian staff member employed by the sending agency, when asked if he would want international student volunteers to stay in his village:

*“If they want to come to my village, they are most welcome to anytime. If they don’t want to come, its fine, not a problem. But if they want to come, I don’t want to see what has been happening in this village. I don’t want those problems. All the donations (should) just go to the village and not just to host families. If groups want to come, bring (a) donation that goes to the school and the students: books, pens and stuff that is good, but there will be no separate donations for individuals and not for host families -- just donations for the community.”*  
-Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4

### ***Preservation of Highlands Village’s Traditional Culture***

One area of focus that was not as clear, due to the mixture in interviewee responses I received, was the villagers’ perspective on the overall impact American IVS

participants have had on the preservation of their traditional culture. As discussed above, interviewee responses shed light on how cultural misunderstandings and lack of communication between community members, IVS volunteers and IVS staff, have resulted in villagers' frustration and discomfort in having American values and habits rub off on their youth. However, in an analysis of interview responses from locals, staff and IVS representatives, I concluded that the IVS program, more specifically the American volunteers, cannot be directly blamed for diminishing Fijian values, and the impact Westernized American culture has had on the Fijians. Yet many interview responses pointed out that the program has sped up the process, highlighted by the common observation that locals were beginning to disregard traditional dress style in favor of Western clothing.

The following interview response from a Fijian IVS staff member gives an overarching view of the situation and stresses the importance of gaining additional understanding of both American and Fijian cultures as a means to help create a balance between the two currently competing cultural forces in the village.

*“Everything changes in the future. We are now in a situation where we have to find a balance. You can't control everything -- you can't say Westerns don't come here, don't wear that -- it's just too much. We need to find a balance but that is a hard decision to make when you reach the point we are at now, deciding between two cultures. The change is coming and other villages without students (American volunteers) are facing the same problem, but here in our village it is faster.”*  
– Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #3

The following two responses given by villagers echoed the previous response regarding the difficulty for villagers, especially younger villagers, to find a balance between the two cultures:

*“It’s hard for them, especially the younger ones here in our village, to see the Westerners wear this and that and then they want to wear it also, but it is not our traditional clothing and it is inappropriate. It really makes it hard for us to make the right choice and wear traditional clothing because students leave (clothing) as a donation and we want to also wear it.” – Fijian Respondent # 4*

*“In the past most of the ladies dressed traditionally in the village, but now you can see the ladies wearing different types of t- shirts, not like the traditional ones in the past. The elders, chief and headsman have been announcing for ladies not to wear t-shirts, but now that the ladies see the students wear that type of dress, they start to wear that dress (too).” – Fijian Respondent # 7*

In the following interview response from a Director of the American IVS sending agency shares a similar viewpoint regarding her perspective on the overall impact American volunteers have had on the expanding the influence of Western culture on the Fijian village:

*“I think it was inevitable, but I’m sure we had some impact on it. The culture in town is changing in a very similar way, much more so than in the Highlands Village. I think that Western culture is so pervasive around the world it’s hard to say that it was the IVS sending company doing it more so than anything else. Potentially we affected the rate and sped it up, but I think we have also tried to be mindful by wearing sulus and sleeved t-shirts and that sort of thing and I think that is helpful. I am now seeing more local girls with tank tops in the village than our students. It’s been a gradual change.” –A Director from IVS Sending Company*

### ***Conclusion to Interview Responses***

The data that emerged from the one-on-one interviews gave unique ‘insider’ insight to the perceived positive and negative effects the volunteers have had on the Highlands Village. Based on the interview responses, I would highly advocate for IVS sending agencies to provide stronger pre-departure information for the American volunteers; restructure IVS programs to include better organized, well-managed group discussion and reflection activities as a means to maximize intercultural learning; and

expand the opportunities for village children to directly interact in one-on-one or small-group settings with volunteers to improve their English skills.

Pre-departure information should include details on village cultural practices, including appropriate dress code and behavior in the village. It should also clearly state realistic roles and expected achievements for American volunteers while they are participating in the one-week program, while emphasizing that intercultural learning, not hands-on service, is the most valuable experience for volunteers living in a host community. Pre-departure information should also include a very specific list of three simple gifts that American students should bring to give their host families to help avoid further escalation of village host family's expectations and gift dependency.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DATA FINDINGS & ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

My qualitative research was two-fold in utilizing interviews and participant-observation methods. Since I was restricted by USF's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) in interviewing American volunteers, I felt it was imperative to incorporate my own observations of the IVS program and the effects I perceived American volunteers had on the Highlands Village IVS host community as a means to give a more rounded and broader perspective.

As mentioned in the Project Overview section of my report, the American teenage volunteers spent 30 hours of their time in the Highlands Village directly involved in volunteering and participating in village community service projects. During the week, American volunteers spent 6 out of the 7 days fulfilling their role as a volunteer. Volunteers split their day between teaching kindergarten through third-grade classes and helping to build the new village primary school.

The first section of this chapter will offer a detailed ethnographic description of a typical morning in the Highlands Village that I experienced as a participant-observer in the kindergarten through third grade classes where American volunteers were fulfilling the role of 'teacher.' The second section of this chapter will offer my observations from a typical afternoon I experienced in the role of a participant-observer at the construction site of the Highlands Village Primary School where American volunteers were carrying out role of 'builders.' The final subsection will offer an overall brief conclusion on my perceived effects the American volunteers has on the Highlands Village participating in these two roles.

### *Volunteers as 'Teachers' in the Village*

As we approach the classroom, the American volunteers stop their conversation and shyly enter, ducking to avoid hitting their heads on the students' freshly painted colorful artwork drying from a piece of twine stretched above. The kindergarten children sit on the carpet with their legs crossed in their blue- and white-checked uniforms, intently observing their teacher who is writing on a chalk board.

Then, a student quickly catches sight of the volunteers entering and yells out, "Teacher, teacher, the Vavalangis!" In a moment the structure and tranquility of the classroom has vanished as students begin to squirm in excitement flailing their arms and pointing at the volunteers. The teacher, dressed in a colorful flowered t-shirt, formal sulu and mid-calf tube socks, turns his head from the chalkboard as his glazed-over eyes quickly scan the classroom for the ruler. He takes a short breath when he spots a long ruler stick lying under his stack of papers, reaches out to grab it and begins to hit it against his desk yelling in a high-pitch voice, "QUIET-KUA Children!" The students immediately begin to calm down as they face forward and re-cross their legs, cupping their hands over their mouths to shield their smirking grins and silence their laughter.

At that moment, the teacher makes his way through the maze of children and approaches the American volunteers to greet them, and then quickly proceeds to complain of a headache. He gives a quick smile as he looks at the American volunteers and comments on how excited the students are for them to be there. He motions with his arm for the volunteers to move to the front of the room and begin teaching. He quickly exchanges a few mumbled words as he hands over the ruler, and turns to the door, muttering, "I have to go and find a tablet for my headache, I'll be right back."

One volunteer gets up shyly and starts to draw a tree on the blackboard, but instantaneously the students' voices start to rise along with their energy. They begin to squirm around on the carpet, pulling on each other's uniforms trying to grab their classmates' pockets' treasures of chewed pencil stubs, scraps of latex from deflated balloons, pebbles and plastic scraps. The volunteers along with an IVS staff member get on the carpet to try to separate the students. As the classroom commotion heightens, the volunteer at the chalkboard puts forth her best effort to forge on with the lesson plan, pointing to certain parts of the tree and asking students to repeat her, however, the sound of her voice is quickly muffled by the loud voices of the children.

In a frantic attempt to regain their attention, another volunteer grabs her backpack and dumps out colored crayons and paper on the floor. Immediately, the children start throwing their bodies over the supplies trying to grab as many crayons as possible. Laughter quickly turns into shrieks as children begin to yell and cry as they fight for the precious paper and crayons. At that moment, I glance up from the pile of screaming children on the carpet and make eye contact with the volunteers at the chalkboard who are staring back at me in total disbelief.

The older classes ran similarly. Upon entering the first and third grade classrooms, it seemed like a somewhat organized school setting with tables and benches and the students were usually found sitting quietly at group tables copying sentences from the chalk board into their notebooks as the teacher sat at her desk grading papers.

Within the first few minutes after greeting the American volunteers, the Fijian teacher would usually tell the students to put away their materials and listen to the volunteers and then turn and walk out of the room. The classes usually ended in a similar

complete chaos with students running around, fighting, teasing and throwing paper.

Volunteers quickly became overwhelmed and discouraged as the students continually ignored their requests to sit and listen, resulting in the majority of class sessions carrying out small-group sing-alongs of Hokey-Pokey, Simon Says or Head-Knees-Shoulders.

### ***Perspective on the Effects of American Volunteers as ‘Teachers’***

The effects of having American volunteers fulfill the role of teacher was ultimately a disastrous experience with negative outcomes for all parties involved -- that is, except for the Fijian teacher who would leave and have the afternoon off. Lack of communication and misunderstanding between Fijian teachers, American volunteers and IVS staff created unrealistic expectations and problematic assumptions that young American volunteers were qualified to teach a classroom of 20 Fijian students without any assistance. American volunteers’ frustration was explicitly apparent from their remarks of how ‘lazy’ and ‘under-qualified’ Fijian teachers are, and how uneducated the Fijian ‘jungle’ children are.

It became apparent that the current program of American teenager filling the role of ‘teacher’ was having extremely negative outcomes, including reproducing and ingraining distorted negative racial and ethnic stereotypes of Fijians on the American volunteers, when ultimately the IVS experience in the Highlands Village was meant to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and to change the underlying negative stereotypes.

### ***Recommendations***

As Raymond and Hall (2008) stated in their IVS research report, “the term ‘teacher’ or ‘expert’ are inappropriate roles for inexperienced volunteer tourists and in assuming these positions of power, could inadvertently reproduce cultural images of

Western superiority representing the notion of the Western volunteer equivocated to the neo-colonialist” (2). Misunderstanding of the volunteers’ skills and qualifications reinforced negative existing myths of Fijian’s mindset of whites having superior knowledge due the historical global structural injustices and Fijian’s being regarded as lazy and uneducated; therefore reinforcing the very dichotomies the IVS experience was supposed to challenge and overcome, what Simpson (2004) referred to in his research analysis as the dichotomy of ‘them and us’ (8).

Management of the volunteers must be developed to improve communication and collaboration between teachers and the IVS sending organization. Clear, structured guidelines need to be set on the use of volunteers in the classroom. Learning, practicing and hearing English being spoken regularly by the American volunteers was the third most-frequently stated positive outcome of the IVS program on the Highlands Village, according to the interview responses. Hence, classroom settings could be better utilized to create an ideal place for American volunteers to facilitate one-on-one English lessons with Fijian students, resulting in a mutually beneficial experience for all.

A strengthened partnership between Fijian teachers and American volunteers must be facilitated by IVS sending organizations to create an opportunity for equitable cooperation and intercultural learning, which would benefit students, Fijian teachers and American volunteers.

### ***Volunteers as a ‘Builder’ in the Village***

Every day after lunch, American volunteers would participate in helping to build the Highlands Village new primary school. The project of building the village primary school is the largest development project and the first long-term project that the IVS

sending organization has funded since the IVS program originated in 1996. All previous development projects funded by the agency have been of a much smaller magnitude and were finished within the continuous 10-week period that the IVS village hosted American volunteers. The primary school construction project, like all other development projects in the Highlands Village, was requested by the village chief and elders of the IVS sending organization.

In 2011 the IVS sending organization officially agreed to fund the materials to build the school, if the Highlands Village fulfilled the following American IVS sending organization's requests: First, the Highlands Village was required to use money donated from another private international organization to pay for a local Fijian contractor to oversee the project. Second, the American IVS agency requested the participation of all 6 clans in volunteering their labor to clear the land and build the primary school. Lastly, village members were asked to actively participate in acquiring all governmental building permits and to request Fiji's government to fund and carry out the paving of the village road leading up to the school.

Through enforcement of all 6 clans volunteering their time and labor in the construction of the primary school, the IVS sending agency is positively reinforcing a participatory development model. As a means to carry out this request, a weekly rotation was created with each of the 6 clans assigned a set day every week to arrive at the construction site, ready to actively participate in the labor process, while the women were expected to cook lunch for the men at the site. American volunteers were assigned daily tasks when they arrived at the site.

### ***Perspective on the Effects of American Volunteers as ‘Builders’***

I witnessed very minimal direct cross-cultural interaction between American volunteers and Fijian community members during community service activities. Local Fijians’ participation in construction of the school drastically fluctuated daily. Some days there were up to 50 Fijians participating in the construction of the school. Other days there were only 5 Fijian volunteers. However, when Fijian villagers were present, rarely did IVS staff position American volunteers to work with the Fijian volunteers in carrying out a joint building project; therefore, there was minimal engagement and interaction between American volunteers and Fijian village community members at the construction site.

### ***Recommendations***

From my observations, I perceived IVS staff lacked understanding of how to strategically use local and American volunteers to work in complementary ways. Due to the scarcity of tools and materials at the construction site (2 shovels, 1 bucket, 1 wheelbarrow with semi-flat tire), IVS staff usually requested local volunteers give their tools to the American volunteers, resulting in local volunteer displacement, ultimately undermining the role of local volunteers while reinforcing the dominant historical stereotypes of American volunteers ‘superiority’ over Fijian ‘inferiority’ rooted in the racist ideology of colonialism.

The current hands on service IVS activity involving American volunteers carrying out the role as ‘builders’ in the construction project of the Village Primary School needs to be re-structured and better managed. Realistic volunteer roles that strategically maximize both local and international volunteers’ strengths are necessary. As previous

research has shown, it is beneficial for local volunteers to be elevated to a position where they can use their expertise to effectively and meaningfully contribute to carrying out development projects in the village (VOSESA, 2011). Giving IVS host community members an elevated volunteer role will help debunk negative stereotypes of IVS host community members being passive recipients of aid and heavily dependent on international volunteers to carry out development projects. Additionally IVS staff members need to restructure building activities for local and international volunteers to work together to promote an ideology of solidarity and as a means to increase the opportunities for intercultural learning.



## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

“If you have come to help me you can go home. But if you have come to see my struggle as part of your survival, than perhaps we can work together.”  
-*Aboriginal Woman (as cited in Ehrichs 9).*

Analysis from my participant observation and interview responses with local Fijian, IVS host community members, led me to conclude that the hands-on IVS service projects involving American volunteers filling the role of ‘teacher’ and ‘builders’ were inappropriate roles for unqualified 14 to 18 year-old international volunteers to fill. Volunteers’ participation in these roles created minimal effective and sustainable outcomes for the host communities and negatively resulted in increased expectations of IVS volunteers and ultimately an increasingly dependent relationship between the Highlands Village community and the American IVS sending agency.

#### **Dependency**

My ethnographic research highlighted how the proliferation of the ‘needs’-based relationship between the IVS sending agency and village host community further strengthened the dependency culture in the Highlands Village. Conversely, as the Highlands Village host community’s expectations for the IVS sending agency to provide all financial and physical means to carry out development projects continually increased; local involvement and participation of local Fijian volunteers in carrying out the service projects decreased. The relationship between host families and American volunteers continually propelled the dependent relationship as the expectations for the Americans’ gifts for their host families increased. The following interview responses from Fijian villagers highlights the ‘dependency syndrome’ that has emerged as international

volunteers have been identified purely as means for financial support and resource mobilization, rather than significant partners in development of the village (Devereux, 2010; Sherraden et al., 2008, Lough, 2010).

*“When it comes to building the school, you have to ask the villagers most of the time and keep reminding them to come to help build. Even when the Vavalangis leave, still not too many people (villagers) come up for the construction. They just wait and think the Vavlangis will come back and finish it.”*  
– Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4

*“The reason for accepting the kids coming into the village is the things they brought to the development. They are going to develop this village into another, a better standard... Westerns will be here forever unless they want to run away, but from a prophecy I know they will be here forever.”* – Fijian Respondent #1

*“Before (Highlands Village) was nothing. No one recognizes it, but thanks to the students (American volunteers) for choosing to come to the Highlands program, because without them there is nothing that could happen in (Highlands Village) and nothing would be happening.”* – Fijian Respondent # 6

*“I think that (American IVS company) will be here forever. Only (American IVS company) did everything in the village like building the Kindie and now primary school.”* – Fijian IVS Staff Respondent #4

It is crucial to note at this point that all Fijian interview respondents stated their belief the IVS sending company would be working in the village and sending American volunteers for a minimum of 5 more years; however, a majority (9 out of 12) local Fijian respondents stated in their interview responses they believed the American IVS sending company would continue sending volunteers to the village forever. Through my ethnographic research, it became apparent that the American IVS agency was fulfilling a critical node for the development of the Highlands Village in mobilizing resources and having American volunteers help to carry out development projects in the rural community of the village. However, in fulfilling this role, the American IVS sending agency has increased villagers' expectations which has resulted in the prevalence of a

dependency culture; therefore, consequentially demotivating villagers to find a more diversified income stream and ultimately perpetuating an unsustainable development practice for the Highlands Village.

### **Sustainability**

*“If you see a drowning baby, you jump to save it, and if you see a second and third drowning baby you do the same. Soon you are so busy saving drowning babies; you never look up to see there is someone there throwing these drowning babies in.” -Wayne Ellwood (Ellwood 1984: 38).*

Since 1996, the American IVS sending agency has chosen to use a participatory development model for the IVS program’s development projects. This model most closely follows the definition given by The World Bank’s Learning Group on Participatory Development (1995), “A process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives, and the decisions and resources which affect them”( 3). After 16 years, the American IVS agency has had a positive effect on the Highlands IVS host village through providing financial assistance and resource mobilization along with American volunteers’ ‘helping hands’ to relieve the immediate and more visible symptoms of underdevelopment. Conversely, the American IVS agency has also had the negative effect of perpetuating an unsustainable development relationship model based on a platform of ‘need’ and ‘dependency’ with the Highlands IVS host village.

With reference to the widely recognized UN definition of sustainable development, “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (United Nations Brudtland Commission March 20 1987), it is accurate to state the current relationship between IVS

Highlands Village and American IVS sending agency is unsustainable and is failing to promote an ideology of self-determination for the Fijian villagers. IVS and the presence of international volunteers in Fiji's Highlands Village repeatedly continues to compromise the ability of the villagers to endogenously and independently meet their needs and gain the participation of the Fijian government to help the Highlands Village develop.

On a micro-level the American IVS sending agency replicates macro-level global developmental NGOs such as the IMF, WTO, and World Bank, which in theory have their best intentions, to utilize a participatory development model for a sustainable development practice (Nelson & Wright, 1995); however, in practice have failed to deliver an effective and sustainable development model for underdeveloped communities in the Global South. It is imperative that a sustainable IVS development model for the Highlands Village incorporates immense opportunities for American volunteers and villagers to engage and participate in group discussions and dialogues around national power imbalances, development, foreign aid, and ultimately address the perpetual underlying global structural violence that continues to reinforce the global patterns of inequality and poverty, hindering then Fijian's ability to meet their own needs. Research has shown international volunteering is most beneficial to both host communities and international volunteers when IVS projects are not only a help in 'service-delivery' type development projects, but also build bridges and develop solidarity for democracy, empowerment and global justice (Comhlámh, 2006).

### ***Recommendations for More Effective IVS Program in Highlands Village***

In conclusion, the mix in expectations of the IVS program in delivering development aid and intercultural understanding as a means to benefit the communities, with those of the student volunteers and their staff, results in a very multifaceted and unrealistic goal. IVS staff members currently struggle to provide proper management and create opportunities for volunteers to produce effective and sustainable outcomes for their host community.

A more sustainable and beneficial program for the Highlands IVS receiving host community, would require the American IVS agency to shift away from the goal of delivering development aid and focus on the goal of intercultural learning, combined with social-justice pedagogy as a means to promote global intercultural understanding. Consistent with IVS research findings by Devereux (2008), “Most significantly, volunteering can raise awareness of, and a commitment to, combating existing unequal power relations and deep-seated causes of poverty, injustice, and unsustainable development” (358). IVS has the potential to challenge unequal power relations and the deep-rooted causes of poverty, injustice, and unsustainable development.

As researchers Powell & Bratović, E. (2007) wrote, “You get the impact you program for.” IVS volunteer management needs to be strengthened with American and local volunteers being used in more complementary ways that integrate and empower locals to engage with American volunteers to help initiate conversation and relationship building. Research has shown intercultural understanding is not a natural result of IVS experiences, but it is more likely to occur when close cultural contact and space for reflection become part of these experiences (Raymond & Hall, 2008). Re-structuring the

IVS program to include more facilitated and structured group discussion and reflection, and additional opportunities for close interaction between international volunteers and local host community members will generate real benefits and create an opportunities for volunteers and local community members in communities like Fiji's Highlands Village in the Global South. Additionally, discussion on redressing power imbalances between North and South could potentially contribute to IVS volunteers having a raised consciousness and being transformed into a more active global citizen that would be highly motivated to participate in social movement activism as a means to challenge the current global structures that allow the continued reproduction of global poverty and inequality and actively seek alternative solutions (McGhee, 2012; VOSESA, 2011).

As my research has shown, American volunteers aged 14-18 do not possess the necessary capacities and/or skill set to carry out construction projects as 'builders' or fulfill the role of 'teachers.' In fulfilling these roles the American volunteers are promoting the negative image of 'neo-colonialist,' further perpetuating negative stereotypes. I strongly advocate for the IVS program to minimize the number of hours American volunteers participate in direct hands-on service, since there is minimal intercultural interaction during these projects and the experience has proven to have been overall frustrating for all involved. This hands-on service effort to deliver development aid shows that all American volunteers are capable of giving is minimal and is not ultimately creating long-term sustainable effects or results to address the larger global structural injustices hindering the Highlands Fijian community from developing endogenously.

The positive effects Fijian interview respondents commented on associated with resource mobilization has brought short-term beneficial effects, but ultimately is leading to an unsustainable development model and increased dependency and expectations from the IVS host community upon the American IVS agency. However, intercultural exchange and English language skill acquisition, the two positive effects highlighted in interview responses of the host community participants, would be strengthened through increased opportunities for dialogue and direct interaction that would be facilitated in an IVS model aimed toward increasing intercultural understanding.

Unlike many other types of tourists and travelers, international volunteers are in a unique position to acquire intercultural competence as they experience new cultures firsthand through direct interactions with locals. International volunteering programs should take advantage of this situation and create opportunities for close interaction between locals, seeking out opportunities to encourage and promote international understanding, shared knowledge across cultures, global engagement, international cooperation, and peace between host community members and international volunteers to create additional positive outcomes for both host communities and international volunteers (Angell, 1969; Chilton, 1978; Wofford, 1966; Palacios, 2010). IVS programs need to be structured to allow volunteers to spend significantly more time participating in dialogue with their host family, group discussions with local community members, and group activities to create the opportunity for real understanding, solidarity, and mutual understanding to develop between international volunteers and the IVS host community.

It is through intercultural understanding these young American volunteers can gain and learn much more than they could ever hope to in merely in helping to build a

school or carry out any other construction project. Conversation and the opportunity for international volunteers to hear the local Fijian community struggles to develop or receive access to basic necessities would promote shared-learning and solidarity and adjust the IVS participant's outlook on global development, poverty and social injustice to create more substantial long-term positive outcomes for the IVS host community. As Paulo Freire (1972) wrote, "a real humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without that trust" (36). Understanding the challenges Fijian host community faces has the likely possibility and potential to debunk deeply engrained stereotypes and inspire volunteers when they return home to become advocates for social, economic, and political change to help break down the structural injustice and power imbalances of aid, trade and development that hinders the development of Fiji Highlands community and many other countries in the Global South. Both, Solidarity and mutual learning because of their respective implications for two-way understanding and change between North and South are two key ingredients I would advocate create effective and beneficial IVS programs for IVS host communities.



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