

**THE EFFICACY OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERISM IN  
PERU AND ECUADOR: A QUALITATIVE REVIEW**

A Senior Scholars Thesis

by

LESLYE JEANNETTE WOMACK

Submitted to Honors and Undergraduate Research  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as

HONORS UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH FELLOW

May 2012

Major: International Studies  
Spanish

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Efficacy of International Volunteerism in Peru and Ecuador: A Qualitative Review  
(May 2012)

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International volunteer service (IVS) plays an integral role in international development by supplying non-profit, nongovernmental and charitable organizations with manpower to serve marginalized populations across the globe. Despite the critical importance of international volunteers, the overall efficacy of IVS is open to discussion. Due to the nature of international volunteerism, volunteers often feel as if their service is ineffective, while at the same time host organizations often feel that volunteers do not adequately suit their primary needs. Through fifteen interviews with Peruvian and Ecuadorian host organizations and fourteen interviews with international volunteers, this qualitative study seeks to assess the challenges of IVS and to identify methods of best practice for this field. This study found cultural obstacles, namely language barriers and difficulties associated with acclimating to foreign environments, to be contributing factors that hinder the efficacy of IVS. Other factors include the duration and personal motivations of a volunteer's service. Additionally, this study also identified a mismatch of supply and demand between international volunteers and host organization needs as a major deterrent

of IVS effectiveness. This mismatch is predicated on the discrepancy between the qualifications and expectations of international volunteers and the needs and expectations of host organizations. The interviews conducted in this study identified specific methods of best practices that enhance international volunteerism and contribute to mutual benefit and fulfillment for volunteers and the organizations to which they render their service. These practices range from volunteer management strategies to characteristics of successful volunteer behavior. It is hoped that these practices will increase the utility IVS even in the face the inherent mismatch of supply and demand of international volunteers.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The popularity of volunteering abroad has skyrocketed in recent years. More volunteers than ever before are packing their bags and heading to the developing world in hopes of experiencing a new culture and making the world a better place. In fact, “over one million volunteers reported volunteering internationally in 2008” (Lough 2010:1). In 2009 and 2011, I added to the rising number of international volunteers by participating in two short-term international volunteer experiences in Guatemala and Costa Rica. Critics debate if the quality of international volunteerism has kept up with the rise in the quantity of volunteers. My experiences brought to my attention several inherent structural weakness of international volunteer service (hereafter referred to as “IVS”) that inhibit the effectiveness of otherwise well-intentioned service. As both a participant and observer of IVS, I began to question the impact power of small-scale projects carried out over a short span of time.

After feeling frustrated and helpless as an international volunteer working on projects such as teaching computer literacy and painting a medical clinic and elementary school, I was forced to reflect on several questions about the efficacy of international

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This thesis follows the style of *Qualitative Sociology*.

volunteerism. Are international volunteers equipped with proper skills and expertise? What are qualities of a successful volunteer? What can be done differently to maximize volunteer efficacy and obtain mutual benefit for volunteers and host organizations? Do volunteers ultimately receive greater benefit than host communities? The answers to these questions entirely depend on the definition of “volunteer” and the context in which international volunteerism is carried out. IVS occurs in several different arenas and is preformed by an array of different actors. Professional volunteers, career volunteers, corporate volunteers, short-term volunteers and virtual volunteers are just a few of the different faces of volunteerism that exist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Globalization, affordable travel, easy access to information, and social media have made international volunteerism easier than ever (United Nations Volunteers 2011).

International volunteers, especially college-aged students, participate in IVS to see the world while giving back to the global community. In recent decades the face of IVS has evolved and become increasingly diverse. Volunteers tend to be white, college graduates and under the age of twenty-four (Lough 2010). The biggest predictors of international service are higher education and income. Volunteers seeking international opportunities have a wide range of choices when it comes to choosing a volunteer sending organization. Volunteerism most frequently occurs under the auspices of public, nonprofit and corporate organizations (Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden 2007). Now that volunteers are willing to pay for IVS experiences, long-term volunteerism is being replaced by short-term placements “that are individually tailored to the volunteer”



(United Nations Volunteers 2011:30). These volunteer-oriented IVS experiences add to the skepticism of the true benefit of short-term IVS.

Short-term volunteer placements are becoming the norm for college-aged students looking to spend a summer or a few weeks abroad. Though good intentioned, these short-term, low-skilled volunteer placements are viewed by critics as “alternative tourism” (Palacio 2010). A survey conducted by the Center of Social Development found that of volunteers who spent most or all their time volunteering abroad, 39% spent two weeks or less abroad (Lough 2010). Short-term service does not allow volunteers to foster quality relationships in the communities they serve. International volunteerism is best carried out when volunteers strive to integrate into the community and create ties of trust and mutual understanding (Palacio 2010).

Critics also argue that short-term placements can lead to paternalistic and unsustainable development outcomes. Despite the negative implications of short-term service, IVS programs as a whole “aim to build connections across national borders, develop intercultural sensitivity and tolerance, increase global consciousness, encourage international solidarity, and promote international peace and understanding” (Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden 2007:4). Volunteers attempt to reach these goals by engaging in a multitude of activities ranging from childcare, teaching English, medical projects, conservation, construction and community development. This study seeks to identify who international volunteers are, where they work, what challenges they face,

and how volunteers are perceived by host organizations. Above all this study hopes to identify the challenges of international volunteer service. Additionally, this study aims to determine the current state of the efficacy of international volunteerism in Peru and Ecuador as well as to identify methods of best practice for IVS.

Research was conducted in Peru and Ecuador through qualitative research means. Data were collected through interviews with volunteers and host organizations, field observations and through literature review. A primary source of first-hand information was collected through volunteering for six weeks in Cusco, Peru. In Peru I worked at an after school center for children ages two to thirteen in an indigenous Andean mountain community outside Cusco. I lived and worked along side fellow volunteers who were interviewed in this study. Interviews were also conducted with Peruvian volunteer agencies. After my volunteer experience in Peru, I then traveled to Quito, Ecuador where I spent the semester studying abroad and conducting interviews with international volunteer-receiving organizations (hereafter referred to as “host organizations”). Ecuadorian host organizations were based out of the capital city of Quito and the neighboring suburb of Cumbayá. Through these qualitative research means, this study will assess the challenges of IVS and identify methods of best practice for international volunteerism.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS

Data in this study were acquired through a mix-methods approach entailing interviews, field observations and a literature review (Creswell 2009). Interviews were conducted with nonprofit and profit-based volunteer organizations in Peru and Ecuador and with fellow volunteers in Cusco, Peru. Additional data were collected from the review of documents, organizational literature and websites of participating host organizations. Participating host organizations were identified by using online search engines, recommendations from other interviews and in large part from a list of volunteer organizations compiled by the Universidad San Francisco de Quito. Interviews were scheduled via email. Invitations were sent to 73 volunteer agencies and fifteen interviews, which ultimately resulted in three in Peru and twelve in Ecuador (see Appendix A). Email solicitations for interviews included a brief description of the study and logistics about the interview's including length, content and methodology. A major challenge of the study was the small sample size of host organizations. It proved extremely difficult to get host organizations to agree to meet for an interview. Of organizations that agreed to an interview, all were exceedingly helpful and enthusiastic. The most common response from agencies that were emailed regarding the possibility of an interview was no response.

The majority of interviews with host organizations were conducted face-to-face and recorded using Garage Band voice recording software and in some cases through use of a Kodak Easy Share video camera. Only audio recordings were made. Two written interviews were completed via email. A written interview questionnaire of ten general questions normally asked in face-to-face interviews was emailed to and completed by representatives from host organizations who agreed to written interviews. Written interviews were completed only when time constraints and physical distance made travel to volunteer organizations impossible. Two Western volunteers working in Peru completed written interviews in English and one face-to-face interview in Peru was conducted in English. The remaining interviews were conducted in Ecuador face-to-face in Spanish. A total of twelve host organizations and one professor from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito were interviewed. In some cases, I spoke with two representatives from the same organization, thus a total of fifteen non-volunteer interviews were conducted.

Interviews were scheduled and arranged through a series of emails and phone calls. All interviews were conducted at the main office of volunteer organizations. The duration of interviews ranged from twenty minutes to one hour. Most participants were eager to showcase their facilities and provided me with a tour. In most cases host organizations provided me with additional information in the form of flyers, brochures and other advertising material pertaining to their organization. Secondary data was also collected from the evaluation of this type additional and supplemental material. Per

recommendation of host organization participant, I attended a volunteer fair in Quito, Ecuador. Data was obtained from the volunteer fair through collecting brochures from volunteer agencies, yearly reports from the United Nations Volunteer Program, and government flyers about social programs.

The most crucial source of research instrumentation was the interview questionnaire (see Appendices B, C, and D). Two versions of the questionnaire were composed- one in English and one in Spanish. The questionnaires consisted of eight to eleven questions that served as a basic guide for interviews. The content of the interview questions derived from previous research and personal IVS experience in Peru, Costa Rica and Guatemala. The questions focused on how host organizations are structured, how organizations deal with international volunteers, how organizations define successful volunteer experiences for both volunteers and their service population, how organizations receive funding, common challenges confronting the organization, how organizations identify community needs, and the personal opinions of interviewees about why international volunteerism is often perceived as inefficient.

It is also noteworthy to disclose that considering Spanish is my second language, the flow of interview conversation was somewhat inhibited. Additionally, conducting interviews was a challenge given the difficulties associated with travel to host organization facilities and other safety concerns. Safety became an issue when using public transportation while traveling with equipment, such as laptops and other

recording devices, and when host organizations were located in remote areas or the dangerous city center of Quito.

As a volunteer in Cusco, Peru, I also engaged in several casual, conversation-style interviews with fellow volunteers. As I lived and worked along side these volunteers, it was easy to candidly engage in discussion and get raw feedback on the issues that bothered, excited and challenged volunteers. The most useful discussions were informal group conversations in casual settings at mealtime or during downtime. The volunteers were aware of my research project and were helpful in divulging any information they could. Being that I was able to foster real friendships with volunteers, I feel that our discussions shed light on their true feelings about their volunteer placements more effectively than a written survey or another form of evaluation. Data gained from conversations with volunteers was logged in an electronic journal and was used to develop the host organization interview questionnaire.

Another important means of gathering data was through my experience and observations as a volunteer and visitor in Peru and Ecuador. I logged my observations of how volunteers seemed to value their service and made notes of how volunteer placement sites were managed. Additionally I also engaged in conversations with in-country support staff such as cooks, guards and housekeepers who worked at the volunteer compound where I lived in Peru. I also formed great bonds of friendship with several Peruvian and Ecuadorian locals who were able to provide me with a holistic evaluation

of the social the cultural environment, albeit on a deeply personal and somewhat biased level.

Interview notes were transcribed and edited immediately after the interviews. Interview audio recordings were translated and transcribed at a later date in order to analyze the data and identify common themes and general trends for data coding. Several themes were recognized and then organized into logical groups. Data were coded then entered into an Excel spread sheet in order to draw quantitative findings. A qualitative analysis of interview transcriptions served as a means of drawing conclusions from the challenges, successes and pitfalls of IVS as identified in interviews. Field observations and personal experience also aided in the data analysis process. Additionally, a literature review of previous related studies aided in interpreting and organizing data gathered from interviews.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

First, I will discuss results that were identified through interviews with host organizations. Interviews were conducted with three childcare organizations, three health organizations, two child education organizations, three multi-service organizations, and one environmental organization accumulating a sum of twelve host organization interviews. Host organization personnel that participated in the interviews were usual presidents of the organization or other high-ranking staff members who were knowledgeable about all facets of the organization. In two cases, I interviewed two representatives from the same organizations. One interview was conducted with an economics professor from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito. Data coding revealed five reoccurring general topics that were repeatedly discussed in host organization interviews: characteristics of effective volunteers, inefficiencies of international and national volunteerism, characteristics of mutually beneficial IVS, and needs and challenges facing host organizations.

#### **Characteristics of effective volunteers**

Interviews revealed that the impact of volunteer service was greatly influenced by service duration. Longer service commitments were reported to lead to better volunteer outcomes. In fact, 100% of organizations agreed that longer placements allow volunteers to adjust to new environments, build meaningful relationships, and create ties of mutual



understanding. The average minimum service commitment of effective volunteers was identified to be three months. More effective volunteers were identified to serve from six months to a year or more. Only two participant organizations from Peru expressed that they focus on attracting long-term volunteers. These organizations advertise volunteer positions as internship style volunteerism. These two organizations serve a specific, specialized purpose and seek volunteers who can stay for a minimum of three months and who have advanced Spanish skills. These two organizations were the only organizations that turned down short-term, unskilled volunteers.

Organizations also unanimously agreed that the intentions and motivations of volunteers drastically impact the efficacy of volunteer service. Altruistic intentions to improve local communities was unanimously agreed to produce positive volunteer outcomes. Fifty-percent of organizations expressed that volunteers with a high inclination to sightsee and travel do not reach their full volunteer potential due to the disruptive impact of long weekends and days off. Effective volunteers were also identified to have advanced Spanish speaking ability, with 58% of organizations agreeing that being able to communicate in the local language maximizes impact by allowing real relationships between volunteers and beneficiaries to form.

### **Inefficiencies of international and national volunteerism**

Several factors that directly lead to inefficiencies in both national and international volunteerism were uncovered. Being that participating host organizations did not

exclusively receive international volunteers, in almost all cases difficulties with national volunteerism were also discussed. In terms of international volunteerism, the biggest hurdle that inhibits volunteer impact was identified to be culture shock and adjusting to new environments, with 25% of host organizations making direct mention of “choque cultural” (culture shock) as an impeding factor and most all other organizations alluding to the challenges that arise from adapting to a new situation, especially in a foreign country. Difficulties adjusting to culture shock were perceived negatively especially when the duration of a volunteer’s commitment was not sufficient to allow for total acclimation. Of the three interviews conducted with Western in-country coordinators, two emphasized disorganization and unclear project goals to be especially taxing on volunteers being that ambiguity creates confusion and inefficient time spent on project sites. Additionally two specialized environmental and medical organizations reported that unskilled volunteers made project implementation difficult when placement tasks required trained professionals or knowledgeable skills.

In reference to national volunteerism, 66% of Ecuadorian organizations agreed that there is lack of volunteer culture in Ecuadorian society. It was reported that the majority of local volunteers are forced to volunteer due to mandatory service requirements. Of host organizations that received local student volunteers obligated by high schools and university service requirements, 25% agreed that obligatory service is futile and “no vale al pena,” or not worth the time and energy. Of organizations that disclosed information about the lack of Ecuadorian volunteer culture, 50% mentioned that individuals required

to volunteer often ask to make a monetary contribution instead of donating their time. Respondents who were more optimistic about national volunteerism (50%), though admitting to the lack of volunteer culture in Ecuador, mentioned that volunteers who were obliged to do community service became more committed and involved in their projects once they witnessed the real needs of their community.

One of the participant organizations only occasionally worked with international volunteers. This particular organization has a larger focus on working with multinational corporations that engage in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) volunteerism in Ecuador. This organization (a U.S. based organization staffed by Ecuadorians called Junior Achievement) mentioned that skilled Ecuadorian volunteers actually provide the best service to local communities. Junior Achievement disclosed that local volunteers feel a greater sense of responsibility and loyalty for their home country and are better equipped to build trust and develop meaningful relationships given their comprehensive understanding of the entire social context of their community. Other host organizations mentioned that international volunteers have a harder time building meaningful relationships with local communities, which impedes their service impact. Two organizations mentioned that in most cases, national volunteers could do the work international volunteer do, but there is a lack of interest in these sorts of projects.

**Characteristics of mutually beneficial IVS**

Aside from meeting the criteria of an effective volunteer (language ability, substantial time commitment, altruistic service intentions, and in some cases specific skills), 50% of the participants specifically stated that communication between host organizations and volunteers was absolutely essential. Host organizations identified communication as weekly meetings, emails, placement visits and end-of-service evaluations. Almost all host organizations reported having some variation of a volunteer evaluation that is completed at the end of a volunteer's service. Three organizations that place more emphasis on volunteer feedback reported hosting weekly volunteer meetings. These organizations were much more involved in the progress of volunteers from start to finish, not just at the end of a volunteer's service. Additionally, matching skills and volunteer interests was identified to produce positive results. Host organizations reported that volunteers that work on projects that pertain to their skill set perform better and are typically more satisfied with their experience.

**Needs and challenges facing host organizations**

Organizations were asked to identify the biggest problems and social needs facing their communities. Of those who responded to this question (eight of twelve), 63% vehemently attested that education was the biggest concern. When answering this question, participants did not hesitate or hold back when divulging all the pitfalls of the education system in Ecuador. Participants reported unequal access to quality education as the main downfall of the Ecuadorian education system. One participant, who works

directly with state schools mentioned that state schools are poorly funded, attended by poor students and ran by incompetent teachers and administrators. Aside from the challenges facing host communities, participants reported that the biggest challenge facing their organization was limited funding. All host organizations unanimously mentioned that securing funding was their primary concern.

### **Host organizations thoughts on Ecuadorian government intervention**

Another theme that was repeatedly discussed in host organization interviews was participant sentiments towards government involvement in their organization's programs. Of the seven organizations that chose to discuss their opinions on government involvement in the development programs of Ecuadorian social organizations, 71% spoke negatively about government intervention. Only two organizations received government funding. Of those organizations, it was made clear that the government aid they received was very small and a trivial part of their annual budget. Some agencies (two), mentioned that they had received government money in the past, but due to the "strings-attached" nature of government intervention, they opted to cease receiving funds in order to maintain autonomy in program management. Loss of autonomy and over-involvement were the biggest complaints of organizations that negatively viewed government involvement and government funding.

### **Secondary findings from host organizations**

Previously mentioned findings were general trends identified in a large number of host organization interviews. This section will disclose information divulged by specific organizations that may only exclusively pertain to the responding organization. Out of all host organization participants, Rotary utilized one of the most methodological and precise means of indentifying community needs. Each year Rotary performs a “línea base” survey (base line survey) to identify areas of urgent community need. The “línea base” survey was described as a census of sorts that seeks to gain information about the living conditions of local families. An American volunteer named Andrew White, who had been working with Rotary for a year, was also interviewed. He reported that it is difficult to get volunteers to work in remote areas being that volunteers are more inclined to work in more industrialized, modern cities.

One of my most enlightening interviews was with an organization named Servicio Ignacio de Voluntariado more commonly known as SIGVOL. SIGVOL is a nonprofit organization that essentially organizes volunteer placements for local and international volunteers. The interview was conducted with a Spaniard who has lived and worked in Ecuador for several years. As a foreigner himself, he was able to divulge useful information about culture shock and the difficulties that confront international volunteers. The participant mentioned that a group German volunteers were currently working with SIGVOL at them time. He noted that the German preference for punctuality, time maximization and optimal productivity occasionally clashes with the

laidback Ecuadorian work ethic, which has less emphasis on clear, set schedules. He also mentioned that foreign volunteers ultimately come to visit Ecuador and sightsee. He did not have a negative view of the tourism tendencies of foreign volunteers, but he did mention that tourism becomes a problem when volunteers do not show up to their placements, take multiple days off, or do not work full days. Additionally, the SIGVOL participant spoke of the ineffectiveness of paternalism and giving out one-time handouts. SIGVOL as well as another participating organization, Fudrine, both stated that their foundations do not believe in paternalism.

Several other organizations also reported challenges such as low community participation in their organization's programs to be top concerns. Rotary reported that their organization is forced to provide incentives such as free pizza in order get the community to attend their educational programs. Casa Victoria, an afterschool daycare, identified low parent involvement to be one of their biggest concerns. Additionally, Casa Victoria reported that security concerns and dangerous living conditions often negatively impact volunteer service. Volunteers working with Casa Victoria live on-site in one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Quito. The participant from Casa Victoria stated, "It takes several weeks to acclimate to a new environment, especially a dangerous environment, so when volunteers are only here for a few weeks, it's hard for them to adjust" (translation to English). Casa Victoria was not the only organization to identify safety concerns as a challenge of volunteer service. Most other organizations

mentioned safety concerns in relation to becoming adjusted to a new environment, not so much as an immediate threat effecting day-to-day service.

Fudrine, an organization that works with disabled children, was helpful in addressing the importance of helping volunteers relate to their service population. During volunteer training, this organization challenges volunteers to try maneuvering through their facilities in a wheelchair to demonstrate how difficult it is to move around with a disability, especially since their facilities are not designed for wheelchair use. Other organizations also stressed the importance of volunteers being able to relate to and identify with their service population. The participant from SIGVOL stated, “Volunteers have to live and breathe the community where they work” (translation to English). Additionally, high volunteer turn over was also identified as a challenge to volunteer efficacy. An organization named Fundación Jutan, an environmental conservation organization, mentioned that due to the seasonal nature of volunteers, volunteer numbers peak over the summer and drop off in off-season months. Jutan reported that large swells of volunteers over summer months create bustling projects for just a short period of time, then are left under-staffed in the fall just as projects start to get into full swing.

Another enlightening interview was conducted with Mercedes Silva, president of ABEI (Amigos Benefactores de Enfermos Incurables). Silva has been a volunteer for 40 years, has attended several world-wide volunteer conferences, and has served on the board for IAVE (International Association for Volunteer Effort.) ABEI holds several weekly and



quarterly meetings with all levels of personnel to make sure that every branch of the agency is well informed and up to speed on the entire foundation's progress. Volunteers are also kept up to speed on all the undertakings of the organization. She identified this well executed communication strategy as a leading attribute of the success of ABEI. This particular participant also discussed that as the role of women have changed over time, so has the face of volunteerism. She stated that with more women in the work force, fewer women (specifically Ecuadorian women) are volunteering. Furthermore, in regard to my research question, the President of ABEI stated, "the bigger problem facing volunteerism in Ecuador is not international volunteers, it's the duplication of services" (translation to English). She identified one of the biggest concerns of IVS in Ecuador to be the need for more cooperation among existing organizations. According to this participant, increased cooperation would mitigate the duplication of services and would diversify the range of community needs met by IVS.

### **How volunteers find host organizations**

It is noteworthy to briefly mention how international volunteers are put into contact with these host organizations. All participating host organizations have websites with information for interested volunteers. Twenty-five percent of host organizations mentioned receiving volunteers (though not exclusively) from language institutions. In Ecuador and Peru, language intuitions and other profit-based companies play a large role in distributing, housing and managing international volunteers. These companies attract volunteers with advanced websites, luxurious living conditions and promises of superior

in-country support. Volunteers who employ the services of these profit-based companies typically pay for lodging, attend Spanish classes and volunteer on the side. Volunteer abroad experiences organized through language institutions and other profit-based volunteer-organizing agencies almost always entail a volunteering fee.

All participant organizations from Ecuador obtain international volunteers through advertising information on their websites. These websites did not have an online application process, as is common for nonprofit volunteer-sending organizations based in the United States. Interested volunteers can inquire about volunteering via email and are put into direct contact with personnel from the host organization that arrange volunteer stays. Of organizations that receive volunteers from partnerships with language institutions, all would receive volunteers free of charge if volunteers chose to come independently. One organization, offers free lodging when volunteers stay for three months or more. Another organization houses volunteers at a minimal cost when volunteers arrange their stays directly through them. All other organizations that did not provide on-site volunteer lodging reported that they work with volunteers to arrange a home stay or other temporary living.

### **International volunteerism from the perspective of volunteers**

Informal, conversation-style interviews with thirteen volunteers were conducted to shed light on the efficacy of volunteerism from the perspective of the volunteer. All but one volunteer interview performed in this study was with individuals who volunteered with

Máximo Nivel in Cusco, Peru. In this section I will speak exclusively about data from interviews with fourteen Máximo Nivel volunteers. Of the volunteers assessed in this study, seven were female age 18 – 25 and five were male age 19- 23. Additionally, one male and female retired couple over the age of 60 was also interviewed. One volunteer had advanced Spanish speaking ability and three were basic to intermediate speakers. The remaining volunteers did not have any Spanish skills before arriving in Peru. The retired couple volunteered for three weeks and the service length of the remaining volunteers ranged four weeks to three months. The average service length, with 62% of volunteers falling within this time frame, was six to eight weeks. Only two volunteers stayed for twelve weeks. These two volunteers were the only volunteers from March 2011 from October 2011 who stayed for three months, which was the service duration maximum for this time frame. The average time spent on placement sites each day was two to four hours. 100% of the volunteers also enrolled in Spanish lessons for at least one week and 57% of volunteers enrolled in Spanish lessons for three weeks or more.

It is interesting to note that all of the volunteers interviewed in this study, including myself, came to Cusco through various non-profit volunteer agencies based out of the United States, England, New Zealand and Australia. It was not until participating volunteers and I were picked up from the airport that we discovered we would be working through Máximo Nivel- our surprise in-country contact. Máximo Nivel was the only for-profit volunteer agency interviewed in the study. Before arriving in Cusco, all volunteers were unaware that they would be volunteering at placements managed by a

profit-based in-county coordinator. The Máximo Nivel director who participated in an interview made it very clear that volunteering is a very small part of Máximo Nivel as a whole and their main focus is their role as a language institution. Máximo Nivel runs a language school in Cusco and houses both volunteers and language students in host family homes and in volunteer houses, which are essentially large, dorm-style compounds with a kitchen and cleaning staff. The volunteers interviewed in this study and I lived in a volunteer house where fifteen volunteers lived at one time. Volunteers worked at local orphanages, medical clinics, schools, daycare centers, construction sites and some volunteers would also spend a few weeks in a near by jungle working on environmental projects. The biggest complaint of volunteers was that the work they performed at their placements was elementary, monotonous and futile.

Of the two volunteers who volunteered for twelve weeks, one worked at four different placement sites and the other worked at three throughout the duration of their service. Of volunteers staying even just eight weeks, 75% worked at more than one placement. Changing placements was entirely voluntary and due to volunteer dissatisfaction. Volunteers who changed sites reported that they felt useless at their placement site. In fact, 100% of volunteers expressed that they felt ineffective at their placement site at least sometimes and an overwhelming majority, but not all, reported that they felt ineffective all the time. Two volunteers reported that they did not witness any impact of their service until heartwarming farewells on their last day at their placements. This feeling of uselessness was used to justify missing placements and not staying at

placements for the required amount of time. Of the volunteers who changed sites, 100% were not equipped with even a basic comprehension of Spanish. All volunteers who could not effectively communicate in Spanish expressed that the language barrier significantly impacted their ability to connect with their Peruvian counter-parts and the populations they served. Of the two volunteers who stayed for twelve weeks, neither had any Spanish speaking ability. Additionally, both these volunteers spent three weeks or more of their time traveling around Peru and South America even though they had paid for room and board at the volunteer house for a full twelve weeks. Of the four volunteers who volunteered for eight weeks, 75% spent a consecutive week or more traveling during the time they were assigned to a placement.

Skipping placement for long weekends and after late nights of drinking was commonplace and became part of the volunteer house culture. Though I observed that the majority of volunteers came to Peru with genuine intentions to volunteer, it seemed as if what volunteers perceived to constitute a “typical volunteer experience” changed upon arrival in country. As a whole volunteers felt very disheartened about the minimal perceived impact of their service. They felt as if their placement sites could have functioned without them and that Peruvian volunteer could have replaced them. More optimistic volunteers believed their biggest contribution to be getting to know a small handful of the kids they worked with and building a meaningful relationship with them. Volunteers working on construction sites reported that when they actually had work to do (which was about 50% of the time), they felt more useful than when they worked at

childcare placements. The majority of volunteers felt time spent at placement sites was maximized when volunteers put more effort into making the most of their limited resources. More pro-active volunteers who demonstrated initiative received the most gratification from their service.

### **Ecuadorian development and the role of the State**

Though this study focuses on IVS in both Ecuador and Peru, given that the majority of interviews with host organizations were conducted with Ecuadorian foundations, more emphasis was given to the nature of development in Ecuador. To investigate this topic, one interview was conducted with a professor of Economics from the Universidad San Francisco de Quito named Wilson Perez. This interview served to shed light on the current state of economic and social development in Ecuador. Ecuador is a developing country home to fourteen nationalities and 13,000,000 citizens. According to a report conducted by the Presidencia de la Republica, 38.3% of citizens live in poverty and 12.9% live in extreme poverty (Secretaría de Pueblos, Movimientos Sociales y Participación Ciudadana 2008). The diverse indigenous population of Ecuador has fueled deep-rooted discrimination and ethnic exclusion. Wilson identified these two concerns as major struggles facing Ecuador. Ecuador is currently making great strides to achieve social inclusion of all ethnic groups and to decrease poverty. According to Wilson, the State plays the biggest role in Ecuadorian development. The challenge of this state-centric development policy is the lack of transparency and poor governance policies (Moreno 2011b).

Several state-run programs exist to mitigate the repercussions of ethnic exclusion and government corruption. One of the largest statewide “social programs” is called the Plan de Buen Vivir, which directly translates to the plan of good living or plan of social welfare. This plan emphasizes increased citizen participation as a means of eliminating government corruption and realizing total social inclusion. The Plan de Buen Vivir also seeks to increase democracy and ensure that all citizens enjoy citizen’s rights. The problem with this well-intentioned social program lies in its implementation. Several agencies, such as the Observatorias y Veedurías Ciudadanas (Citizen Observers and Overseers), exist to increase citizen participation in programs of the Plan de Buen Vivir (Moreno 2011a).

Wilson expressed that millions of dollars are pumped into these social programs, but very little return of investment is seen. Wilson suggests that Ecuador should adopt economic policies that eliminate clientelism to address the low rate of return of expensive social programs. Wilson did not share much insight into the realm of IVS in Ecuador, but he did state that more attention should be placed on increasing Ecuadorian capacity to run programs themselves without too much interference from the global community. Wilson emphasized that the biggest challenges facing the country are government corruption and economic concerns that cannot directly be influenced by volunteers.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### **Personal observations of host organizations**

After conducting interviews, participating in field observation, performing a literature review, and through coding data, I came to several personal conclusions about the state of IVS efficacy in Peru and Ecuador. In respect to the host organizations interviewed in this study, I identified a lack of true need for international volunteers to be the most surprising finding. In most interviews, participants were quick to discuss national volunteerism in Ecuador and their need for more skilled Ecuadorians at placement sites. I got the impression that these host organizations viewed international volunteers as more of a cultural exchange component of their organizational agenda than as a critical aspect of their development agenda. Being that all organizations were more concerned with securing funding than anything else, I perceived international volunteers and their efficacy to be low on the radar of host organization concern. Though these agencies did note several concerns about international volunteers, especially in relation to high volunteer turnover, host organizations generally had a positive view of volunteers. But it was not evident that these organizations viewed volunteers as an integral part of program implementation. Being that this study only dealt with a small sample size of host organizations, this finding cannot be generalized for all volunteer-receiving organizations.



It was interesting speaking with volunteer agencies that receive volunteers both independently and through profit-based volunteer organizing companies. These host organizations were baffled as to why volunteers choose to pay to volunteer versus going directly through their organizations. I believe that there are a smaller number of independent volunteers due to imperfect information. Volunteers typically discover volunteer opportunities using the Internet. These volunteers do not have time to sift through individual prospective volunteer placements and would rather pay for the convenience of having another party organize their experience for them. When these profit-based organizations arrange volunteer placements, profit maximization and volunteer satisfaction are a principal concern. This type of approach puts the needs of local communities on the back burner and leads to low impact volunteer experiences. It was also observed that long-term volunteers who were more concerned with volunteering than traveling took the time to identify a host organization and traveled independently to work for those organizations. In short, the intentions of volunteer service are paralleled by the means by which volunteers arrange their volunteer stay.

### **Personal observations of the nature of international volunteers**

Personal observations, field experience and volunteer interviews pinpointed several key findings about the nature and tendencies of volunteers. Both volunteer motives for participating in IVS and the dynamic of volunteer housing play a role in creating a unique “volunteer culture” that significantly influences volunteer efficacy. Volunteers with genuine intentions for volunteering (i.e. helping others, making a difference, and

sharing skills and expertise) are most satisfied by their service. Good intentions alone did not lead to the most satisfied volunteers. A good handle on the Spanish language and a minimum three-month service commitment also lead to higher volunteer satisfaction. I consider service duration and language ability to be the biggest predictors of mutual satisfaction for both volunteers and the communities they serve. Volunteers with shorter service commitments and minimal language skills often had less altruistic motives for volunteering. In my experience volunteering in Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru and Ecuador, an overwhelming majority of volunteers I worked with spoke minimal Spanish and spent an average of one to six weeks at volunteer placements. The principal motivation of these volunteers seemed to lie in experiencing a different culture and exploring a new environment more so than serving a foreign community. In my opinion, college-age volunteers who spend summers or other short vacation periods abroad receive more benefit from their IVS experiences than local communities. It is important to note that only volunteer satisfaction, not the efficacy of an individual's volunteer service, can be accurately measured by this study. Gauging the efficacy of projects requires longitudinal studies that were not part of this research design. Though this study did not identify a concrete way to gauge the efficacy of IVS, volunteer opinions and perceptions about the impact of their service does hold some weight in getting a general feeling for the efficacy of volunteer service.

In my experience, volunteer housing also significantly impacts volunteer service.

Volunteers typically have the option of living with host families, in on-site volunteer

compounds, in off-site volunteer houses or through independent means. Each distinct living situation distinctly influences “volunteer culture” and molds the lens through which volunteers view their service and dictates what constitutes acceptable volunteer behavior. In all cases when Ecuadorian host organizations provided volunteers with on-site living accommodations, volunteers worked full day shifts, lived alone or with one other volunteer and stayed for an extended period of time of three months or more. It was my observation that these volunteers experience a continued feeling of connectedness with their placements.

One of the most interesting living accommodations was a volunteer house. Volunteer houses are off-site compounds where a large number of volunteers (typically ten to eighteen) eat, sleep and dwell along side each other. Volunteers work at an array of different placements, have varying volunteering schedules and often find themselves at the volunteer house through different non-profit volunteer-sending organizations that employ the services of the same profit-based in country coordinator. Volunteers come to live at volunteer houses over a staggered period of time, allowing for the interaction of “old” and “new” volunteers. So-called “veteran volunteer” (typically veteran by a few days or a few weeks) serve as knowledgeable resource for new volunteers. This type of housing dynamic produced both positive and negative benefits. In my experience, volunteers lose interest and become jaded by their placements overtime. They then pass this negative attitude on to new volunteers who are initially excited and enthused about their volunteer placements.

After observing three volunteer houses in Peru, several trends became evident. Volunteers living in these houses become great friends, spend long weekends traveling together, and spend late nights out drinking. This type of volunteer interaction is natural and expected. In my opinion this type of behavior only creates a negative impact on service when volunteers skip placement. Skipping placements seemed to be the norm in all volunteer houses I visited in Peru. Initially the majority of volunteers seemed to be hesitant about missing their placements. Veteran volunteers were typically quick to pacify hesitant volunteers by assuring them that ‘everybody misses placement.’ In my opinion, the type of volunteer culture fostered by volunteer houses perpetuates the idea of short-term IVS as volunteer tourism.

### **Challenges of short-term IVS**

Numerous challenges and pitfalls of IVS were also uncovered. In this section I will discuss IVS as a whole, but with greater emphasis on short-term volunteerism considering it is the most common form of IVS in general and was the most frequently observed type of volunteerism in this study. Short-term IVS experiences are typically tailored to the volunteer instead of the community. Critics believe short-term IVS to be volunteer tourism more so than true volunteerism. A study by Jenny Morgan states, “emphasis on the experience of the volunteer is problematic” (Morgan 2009). Morgan also makes the claim that “volunteer tourists are limited to more simple tasks, small in scale, with minimal impact” (2009). This claim is supported by overwhelming feedback from both volunteers and host organizations involved that identified volunteer tasks to

be arbitrary and ineffective. Morgan's study also emphasizes that short-term volunteer tourists "can risk being a burden on local staff and becoming a drain on local resources." I found this to be true especially when highly specialized work sites require specific training. High volunteer turnover can be financially draining on host organizations that have to continually train new volunteers to perform specialized tasks. The adage that 'doing something is better than nothing' is often used to justify short-term IVS. Though the credibility of this statement cannot be completely discounted, it is "undermined when volunteer tourism has negative effects on the local community" (Morgan 2009). I consider this idea that short-term IVS does more harm than good to only be applicable under very specific conditions such as when unskilled volunteers receive specific, one-on-one training that is only utilized for a short period of time.

One of the biggest criticisms of IVS is that projects are unsustainable. A study by the International FORUM on Development Service states, "Short volunteerism often means 'doing the job yourself' compared to long-term volunteerism, which is more focused on working with people for sustained development" (Brassard et al. 2010:54). This study provides no real evidence to support this claim, but it could be argued that host organization preference for national volunteers over international volunteers manifests that communities receive more benefit from volunteers who can better relate to the community and can commit to a longer duration of service. Almost all Ecuadorian host organizations had a national volunteer component to their organizational structure. These organizations spoke highly of national volunteers, but 66% admitted that they felt

that there was a lack of volunteer culture in Ecuador. National volunteers play an important role in community development. Being able to communicate and build strong relationships with local communities was identified to be one of the most important components of successful IVS. Of the volunteer placements observed in this study, national volunteers could replace a good majority of international volunteers. Doing so would eliminate the obstacles that arise from cultural barriers. In fact, a study by Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden (2007:7) states, “Creating a mix of volunteer and community contributions maximizes the impact of international volunteers. ‘Demand-driven’ placements are most effective when volunteers do not replace activities that could otherwise be accomplished by local citizens.”

Additionally, international volunteerism can be viewed as exemplifying qualities such as “paternalism, amateurishness, and less focus on development outcomes” (Baker et al. 2004:10). The notion of “any implication of ‘sacrifice’ being involved” is deemed inappropriate by critics of IVS. Implications of paternalism being associated with the term “volunteer” have made some IVS organizations shy away from using the term in their nomenclature. Moreover, a study by Stephen Wearing argues,

“There are enough developed nations already working in developing countries and increasing this level through alternative touristic activity is not going to help resolve local problems. One fundamental danger is that volunteers can reiterate to the ethos of the ‘expert’, thus promoting deference in the local community to outside knowledge, therefore contributing to the curtailment of self-sufficiency” (2004:211).

This point of view was not explicitly supported by host organization interviews, but is in alignment with several volunteer interviews. Most of the volunteers involved in this

study were young college students or young people in their early twenties who had recently graduated from college. Several volunteers expressed their frustration with how their volunteer sites were managed and mentioned that if they had more time they could essentially 'make it better.' When Western ideas and practices differ from those of local communities, it is easy for the volunteer to subscribe to their own experience and believe that practices they are most familiar with work best. When volunteers try to impose their practices and beliefs on local communities without giving consideration to the cultural framework of the community at hand, efficacy can be lost to a cultural disconnect.

### **The prospect of neo- colonialism as a deterrent of short-term IVS**

A study by Carlos Palacios entertains the idea that tourism motivated volunteering can ultimately lead to negative outcomes and the unsolicited imposition of Western power and influence. Palacios perceives volunteerism by low-skilled Westerners attempting to enforce Western influenced development agendas in the global South to be a form of neo-colonialism. The assumption that Western college students know better than the local staff can perpetuate the idea that 'West is best' (Palacios 2010). A lack of cultural sensitivity by both volunteers and local communities leads to a working environment precluded and convoluted by cultural disconnect. Palacios begs the question of whether or not "Westerners possess the necessary capacities and motivations to produce effective help" (2010:863). Several studies indicate, "Volunteers do not have enough knowledge, reflection capacity, appropriate skills or qualifications, volunteering and international

experience, time to get involved with locals or altruistic intentions” (Palacios 2010:863). Authors that subscribe to this critical theory of development argue, “Western intention of *helping* underlying the development aid goal is humanitarian as much as it is colonialist” (Palacios 2010:864). Palacios calls for a reframing of the goals of international volunteerism on the bases that what it does and what it claims to do are separate issues. According to his suggestion, IVS goals should be reframed to incorporate goals of “international understanding and intercultural learning.” He claims that these revisions have the “most potential to strengthen global civil society” (Palacios 2010:864).

Other authors have also expressed the tendencies of IVS practices to be forms of neo-colonialism. Laing and Ooi argue that volunteers have the tendency to make rash generalizations about host countries and promote “the other” stereotype that all people are poor. In an article evaluating the differences in backpackers and volunteers, Laing and Ooi state, “There is a danger that [volunteer tourism programs] may inadvertently ‘reinforce power inequalities’ and this represents ‘a form of neo-colonialism or imperialism’ with respect to developing nations” (2010:193). Several authors argue that volunteer tourism may promote the “homogenized notion of ‘the other’ through simplistic descriptions and limited interactions with the Third World” (Laing and Ooi 2010:193). This claim is supported by conversations and interviews with international volunteers. When a volunteer spends a limited amount of time in a country and chooses to expend a majority of that time volunteering in communities most affected by poverty, it is easy for volunteers to assume and draw conclusions that the majority of their host



country is equally plagued by extreme poverty. Host organizations often appeal to the pathos of volunteers and use heart-wrenching tales of their communities when trying to attract volunteers. Several host organizations noted that seeing the needs of their communities draws volunteers to their sites. Though there is no intended harm in this type of recruitment tactic, it can cause volunteers to make inaccurate generalizations about a country based off one or two weeks working with a small, specific population. Due to this discrepancy between exposure and actuality, the positives of promoting IVS as a venue for cultural exchange can be somewhat diluted in this respect.

### **Volunteer benefit and the real impact of IVS**

Academia has given less attention to the actual benefit of IVS and has placed more efforts towards evaluating the impact of IVS on volunteers. This is due in large part to the difficulty associated with evaluating and measuring the long-term impact of volunteer placements. Volunteers, host organizations and field experts have grown to view the central focus of international volunteering as cultural learning and exchange more so than development (Wearing 2004). Wearing states, “Learning components within this exchange include academic learning, the development of personal knowledge, self-confidence, independence, cultural awareness and social abilities” (2004:212). An impact study by the American Field Service of over 1000 high school students found that “the participant’s greatest amount of positive change was in awareness and appreciation of the host country and its culture” (Wearing 2004:212). Interviews with volunteers and host organizations support this claim. IVS becomes a

learning experience for both volunteers and host communities. Volunteers are forced out of their comfort zones and faced with new challenges that lead to personal growth and development, while host communities are able to learn about different cultures through interaction with foreign volunteers.

Though volunteers often end up receiving greater benefit than host communities, volunteers in this study as well as those identified in previous studies report motives such as “being useful, altruism and being needed” to have the biggest influences on decisions to volunteer abroad (Wearing 2004:212). Wearing (2004:217) argues that volunteers are “pushed” to volunteer because of motives such as “discovery, enlightenment and personal growth,” and they are also “pulled” to volunteer internationally by the allure of travel and the adventure and romanticism association with living and working in a foreign environment. The desire to make a difference and this “push-pull” effect constitute two mutually exclusive intentions for volunteerism, altruism and ego-enhancement, that influence volunteers in their decision to volunteer abroad (Palacios 2010). The collision of these two mutually exclusive motivations can be interpreted as fundamental deterrent of positive IVS outcomes.

### **The nature and challenges of generation Y volunteers**

It was previously stated that the typical international volunteer is under the age of twenty-four. This age group, commonly referred to as generation Y, interacts with the world differently than previous generations. It is important to take into account the

nature of these generation Y volunteers when discussing challenges of IVS. Michael Loh, chairman of Managing and Organizing Volunteer Efforts, describes American generation Y volunteers as “achievement-oriented; confident and ambitious; not afraid to question authority” (2011). He further describes this age demographic as “attention-craving” and further qualifies this characteristic by highlighting this generation’s need for feedback, guidance, praise, reassurance and being ‘kept in the loop’ (Loh 2011). This constant need for feedback and detailed instruction is at odds with the Peruvian and Ecuadorian management style.

The perception of time in Peruvian and Ecuadorian cultures varies drastically from the Western mindset. “Mañana” (literally translated to tomorrow) is often used to describe the laidback nature of Latin work ethic. Though the laid back nature of Latin culture is a simple generalization and is by no means true across all host organizations, several host interviews did identify this cultural disconnect as a challenge of volunteer service. Host organizations also place a great deal of autonomy in the hands of volunteers and do not have the time or resources to micro-manage volunteer projects and provide volunteers with continual feedback. The problem of limited feedback and responsiveness is further complicated when volunteers and host organizations cannot effectively communicate due to language barriers. It could be argued that the frequent sentiment expressed by volunteers that their efforts feel useless may be due in part to this disconnect between given praise and need for praise.

Loh also highlights volunteering styles as challenges to volunteer management. He identifies episodic volunteering, virtual volunteering, and off-site volunteering as problematic volunteer styles. According to Loh, episodic volunteering is defined as volunteering characterized by short-term commitment, fewer work hours and fewer leadership roles. The majority of volunteers evaluated in this study qualify as episodic volunteers. Loh characterizes episodic volunteers as wanting quick training, instant access and immediate access to information. Given scarce resources and time constraints, host organizations often find it difficult to accommodate the preferences of generation Y and episodic volunteers.

### **Impact of the rhetoric of short-term IVS**

Role ambiguity and the rhetoric of short-term IVS have also been considered factors that lead to frustration and unclear service goals. It has been argued that distancing the language of volunteering from development and aid rhetoric could help to avoid negative outcomes by lowering the expectations of both volunteers and host organizations (Palacios 2010). Host organizations tend to burden volunteers with assumptions that volunteers possess a great deal of knowledge and can formulate valuable advice for host communities. The fact of the matter is that these short-term volunteers generally have no real expertise and lack the knowledge and skills to back up these assumptions. To evade this disconnect, Palacios argues that short-term IVS should shift its focus away from international development and focus on promoting short-term IVS as “international understanding and intercultural learning.” Palacios and other scholars

emphasize that clearly defining goals helps to mitigate role ambiguity and volunteer disappointment. In my experience volunteers feel a sense of validation from viewing their service as a grad jester of international development. But in reality short-term IVS is often not in alignment with development goals. Palacios argues that in the context of volunteer tourism, language such as “contributing to the future of others,” “making a difference,” and “doing something worth while” could be “disguising a development agenda and at the same time reinforcing unreflective volunteer practices” (2010:874). Even if the rhetoric of short-term IVS does lead to disappointment in the overall impact of volunteer placements, it does help “facilitate cross-cultural connections that might not be as productive and emotional under other frameworks such as service learning, cultural exchange, or educational tourism” (Palacios 2010:874).

### **A positive look at short-term IVS**

Though evidence suggests minimal impact of small scale, short-term volunteerism, this type of IVS cannot be discredited as entirely ineffective. Several authors argue that there is always likely to be a level of demand for short-term volunteer placements. Additionally, the presence of volunteer tourists can generate economic benefit as it is “recognized that tourism can contribute to poverty in less developed countries” (Wearing 2004:218). Though short-term IVS is not considered sustainable development, it is considered sustainable tourism being that volunteer tourism has minimal impact on the environment and requires little specialized infrastructure (Wearing 2004). Furthermore, several authors including Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden (2007) subscribe to the

idea that IVS succeeds in creating a “virtuous circle of service and civic engagement.” According to Palacio (2011:5), IVS is successful in that it fosters “cross-cultural skills and tolerance, global awareness and international solidarity, civic engagement, personal development and international peace.” In fact, one of the biggest impacts of short-term IVS and volunteer tourism is its role in prompting volunteers to participate in long-term IVS projects in the future and strengthening cultural understanding.

Another beneficial outcome of IVS is its contribution to building social capital, i.e. social resources that are embedded in communities and in organizations. Social capital strengthens communication networks, helps with information flow, builds trust and promotes partnerships. Governments value the ability of social capital to build strong communities, which in turn cost governments less in the long run (Baker et al. 2004). More specifically governments are keen on social capital derived from the direct and indirect impact of domestic volunteering. According to Baker et al. (2004:7), “Some estimates value [the social capital derived from domestic volunteering] at between 8% and 14% of GDP.” Additionally, social capital is often “widely recognized as having the potential to sustain and renovate economic and political institutions” (Baker et al. 2004:14). Though this study has rigorously refuted the efficacy and true value of short-term IVS, there is well-documented evidence that short-term IVS is not completely futile, especially considering its contribution to social development and cultural exchange.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Supply and demand mismatch of international volunteers**

A critical finding identified in this study was a mismatch in supply and demand between international volunteers and host organization needs. In reference to a mismatch in volunteer capabilities, both service duration and language ability proved to be the most frequently identified deficits of supply and demand. Aside from one long-term volunteer, this study did not encounter a single volunteer who stayed at one specific placement for longer than eight weeks. Host organizations were quick to report that optimal service impact is achieved when volunteers can commit to a three-month service minimum. In fact, over half of participant host organizations ideally prefer volunteer service duration to range from six months to one year. I consider this time commitment mismatch to be the single biggest deterrent of IVS, not just in Peru and Ecuador, but also across the globe. Due to this concern, the type of volunteerism discussed in this study best fits the profile of low-impact volunteer tourism as described in the previous chapter.

Language ability proved to be another significant mismatch. Seventy-eight percent of volunteers reported having no Spanish speaking ability before arriving on site. All host organizations emphasized building trust and meaningful relationships with locals as critical components of successful volunteer service. The ability to effectively

communicate with local counterparts in the same language is the most effective way to build trust and develop meaningful relationships.

Motives for participating in IVS constitute another mismatch in supply and demand.

Though the initial decision to volunteer abroad generally stems from altruistic intentions, once volunteers arrive in country, they are distracted from their service and prioritize site seeing and travel over dedicating their time and energy to their placements. In contrast, host organizations valued volunteers who viewed volunteering and ‘making a difference’ as their principal motive for volunteering. Host organizations were optimistic that volunteers were drawn to projects after they witnessed the true needs of local communities. But despite placement appeal to volunteer pathos, volunteers frequently took extended time off from volunteering to travel and explore. Volunteers also reported missing placements because they felt useless and unneeded. Sometimes this feelings of futility are warranted, other times they can be attributed to the minimal emphasis host organizations give to volunteer feedback and the feedback-seeking nature of volunteers.

Field observation identified the top motives for volunteering abroad to be the desire travel and experience a new culture. This is supported by a study by Laing and Ooi (2010:200), which identifies the top three volunteer tourism motives to be “experiencing something different and new,” “desire to travel,” and “[learning] more about other cultures” respectively. More altruistic motives such as “[accomplishing] something” and “[making] a difference” finally made the list ranking seventh and eighth respectively. In



contrast, host organizations interviews identified motives like wanting to give back and the desire to help others to be the best motives of effective IVS. These findings as well as other discrepancies constitute a mismatch in supply and demand between international volunteers and host organization needs. This mismatch is expanded below in Table 1.

**Table 1** Supply and Demand Mismatch of International Volunteers

<b>Supply (International volunteers)</b>	<b>Demand (Host organization needs)</b>
1 – 8 week average time commitment	3 month minimum (6 months to 1 year ideal)
Basic (if any) language ability	Intermediate- advanced language ability
Lack pertinent skills	Specialized skills preferred/ assume that volunteers possess professional skills
High expectations/ want to ‘save the world’	Seek flexible, realistic volunteers
Need instruction, feedback driven	Seek self starters and initiators
Motivated by experiencing something new, the desire to travel and wanting to learn about other cultures	Seeks volunteers who have an interest in the organization, who are committed to their placements and have a passion for service

### **Methods of best practice**

The gap between available volunteers and the needs of host organizations creates frustration, disappointment and minimally effective IVS experiences. To address these challenges, this study has identified a list of methods of best practice that hope to increase the efficacy of IVS and lead to mutually beneficial volunteer experiences.

These methods of best practice apply to two specific areas: (1) volunteer project management, (2) volunteer qualifications behavioral attributes. Methods of best practice for volunteer and project management are enumerated in List 1.

**List 1. Methods of Best Practice for Volunteer and Project Management**

1. Responsiveness to community needs
2. Demand-driven projects
3. Manage of volunteer expectations
4. Projects in alignment with the local development policy
5. Autonomy in the hand of locals
6. Clearly define how success and efficacy are measured
7. Inclusion of volunteer sending and receiving organizations
8. Promote long-term service
9. Sustainability of short-term service through documentation
10. Emphasis on volunteer selection and management
11. Skill matching
12. Orientation and training
13. Culture awareness training for volunteers and local staff
14. Improved documentation of successful practices
15. Communication between volunteers and host organizations

Responding to community needs was identified as one the most effective practices of successful volunteer projects. Demand-driven programming is more desirable, in which host organizations define their needs and priorities for volunteer placement. Host interviews and previous studies all identified demand driving projects to produce the best out comes (United Nations Volunteers 2011). Furthermore it is important that volunteer projects are “in alignment with the development policy of the host region, and local communities should have a platform to clearly state their development needs” (Morgan 2009). As discussed in chapter III, Rotary Club Quito Valle Interoceánico already practices this strategy of identifying true community needs through their “línea base” need assessment survey. Rotary has found this practice to be a very effective tool in assessing community needs and designing programs to adequately suit these needs.

Placing autonomy in the hands of local staff was identified as another important method of best practice (Keesbury 2003). Giving autonomy to local staff ensures the implementation of demand-driven projects and promotes the idea of sustainable development. Though local staff should play an integral role in volunteer placements, it is important for volunteers to sustain a continued and consistent presence at placements. Even if short-term volunteers constitute the majority of volunteers at a placement site, there should be a continuous, undisturbed flow of out-going and in-coming volunteers.

To ensure an efficient distribution of volunteers to their respective placements, “volunteer tourism needs to be managed at all levels of the chain” (Morgan 2009). A study by the US Agency for International Development indicates, “when international service programs integrate host organizations and communities into the design and delivery process they are more successful at achieving goals for all involved” (Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden 2007:7). Including host and sending organizations in the planning and delivery process is crucial for eliminating volunteer and host country bias in orientation and training. Both parties need to employ culturally sensitive practices in the volunteer management process. The distinct cultural perspectives of host organizations, volunteers and volunteer managers can deter project efficacy when these differences are not taken into account throughout every step of volunteer management.

Increased attentiveness to volunteer selection and management is crucial to the success of IVS (Vibar 2011). Everything from “recruitment and selection to training, placement,

and follow-up” should be managed with cultural sensitivity (Morgan 2009). In the recruitment and selection stage, volunteer organizing agencies should pay special attention to managing volunteer expectations through eliminating foreign aid and development rhetoric from descriptions of short-term IVS outcomes. Promoting the current mainstream form international volunteerism (short-term IVS) as cultural exchanging and service learning could eliminate volunteer frustration and would more accurately define the real outcomes of short-term service. Additionally efforts should be made to manage the expectations of volunteers. Volunteers need to be made aware of the complexities of development “and what can be achieved, realistically, in the short term” (Morgan 2009). In briefing volunteers about their service, host organizations and volunteer managers need to be upfront about the typical outcomes of volunteer service. In addition, volunteer organizations need to make strides in promoting long-term service. According to Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden (2007:6), 40% of volunteers in a study “agreed that long-term service is useful as a tool for community development.” Volunteer managers should keep this in mind during the recruitment process and pay special attention to attracting long-term volunteers.

Another practice of successful volunteer management is skill matching. Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden (2007:8) states, “It is important to match volunteer background, motivations and skills to the volunteer role.” Interviews revealed that the majority of college-aged volunteers prefer placements that reflect their future career goals and suit their majors. Interviews with host organizations revealed that volunteers perform better

when they are interested in their placements. It is also important to educate volunteers about cultural differences. More importantly, volunteers must be familiarized with strategies that help volunteers cope with these differences. Volunteers need to be made aware of even seemingly small cultural differences that could potentially affect interaction with host communities. Volunteer interviews suggest that the majority of volunteers have little to no prior knowledge of their host countries. It is important to supply volunteers with “knowledge about the host country, its history, and its geopolitical relationships” to the social-political environment of their volunteer placement (Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden 2007:8).

Additionally, host organizations should clearly define job descriptions for volunteers and compile a detailed volunteer handbook (Duff 2010). Specific guidelines and availability to information is highly successful in creating knowledgeable volunteers. Increased support, supervision and training have also been identified as practices that lead to successful volunteering outcomes (Brassard et al. 2010). As discussed in chapter IV, generation Y volunteers are detailed oriented and feedback driven. To cater to information driven generation Y volunteers, responsive local counterparts should supply volunteers with detailed job descriptions and clearly defined goals. Additionally it is important to explicitly define what constitutes project success. Host organizations and volunteers alike have to ask themselves if success is measured by volunteer satisfaction or community impact. A clearly defined rubric for measuring efficacy helps to formulate project goals and mitigates the confusion project implementation (Morgan 2009).

Aside from previously mentioned managerial methods of best practice, this study also identified several practices that constitute successful volunteer qualifications and behavioral attributes. These practices are enumerated in List 2 and are detailed in the section below.

**List 2. Methods of Best practice for Volunteer Qualifications and Behavioral Attributes**

1. Commitment to building trust and increasing mutual understanding
2. Long-term service commitment of 3 months to 1 year
3. Intermediate to advanced language ability
4. Integration into the local community
5. Cultural awareness
6. Genuine interest in assigned volunteer placement
7. Sensitivity and commitment to local culture
8. Realistic expectations
9. Applicable skills for specialized placements

Building meaningful relationships and bonds of trust have been repeatedly identified as an important element of a volunteer's service. Longer-term placements and altruistic service intentions allow volunteers to better integrate into the community, build trust and increase mutual understanding. Lough, Moore McBride, and Sherraden (2007:7) states, "When organizations and residents in host communities perceive volunteer motives as altruistic and aligned with the goals of the host communities, trust is established that helps communities participate more fully in the development process." Volunteers can gain trust through acts that demonstrate altruistic motives and through simply taking the time to get to know the local community. A key component to building meaningful relationships is the ability to communicate in the same language. Though it is commonplace for host organizations to loosely enforce language requirement, the

majority of organizations in this study identified the ability to speak Spanish as a leading attribute of successful volunteers. I resolve that short-term volunteers should have a minimum of an intermediate language ability or at least a demonstrated willingness to learn the local language if their service duration exceeds two months.

A structured work schedule is also crucial to volunteer success. The natural inclination for volunteers to maximize their time in another country by traveling and site seeing creates interruptions in service and causes volunteers to take extended trips and miss days at placements. It is important for volunteers to treat their placements like a job and understand that they are needed at their placements every day. In short, volunteers must be committed to their sites and treat tourism as a secondary motivation for their time abroad. Although achieving maximum community impact is obtained through long-term service, the supply of minimally skilled short-term volunteerism continues to surpass the number of long-term volunteers.

Keeping this in mind, it is important to seek out long-term sustainability for short-term service. One of the best ways to achieve this is through thorough documentation.

Volunteers are often forced to ‘reinvent the wheel’ if their predecessors do not leave behind adequate documentation that spells out what has worked in the past. Each generation of out-going volunteers should tweak and revise pass-down information for in-coming volunteers. An up-to-date record of methods of best practices that is individualized for each volunteer placement and volunteer role is essential for the

success of short-term IVS. Keesbury (2003:8) also identifies “well-defined, highly focused interventions” and “long-term programming strategies and repeat assignments” as factors that lead to successful short-term IVS outcomes. Given the high turn over of short-term volunteers, the success of repeat assignments as mentioned by Keesbury can be made even more efficient by increased documentation of successful projects.

In conclusion, it is important for all realms of volunteerism to continually reevaluate their goals and objectives and carry out practices to ensure that they produce positive outcomes for host communities. The unique nature of the managerial processes of individual IVS organizations will make the total inclusion of the aforementioned methods of best practices an arduous task. Host organizations should identify areas of their organization that solicit the greatest structural change and tailor these practices to suit their needs. More importantly, volunteers should reevaluate their motives for volunteering and contemplate the true impacts of short-term IVS before deciding to stroke their egos by volunteering aboard. Further study should consider evaluating the impacts of revamping the current rhetoric of short-term IVS more closely parallel its true impact and purpose. It is noteworthy to conclude that despite its inefficiencies, IVS promotes priceless cross-cultural understanding and a great deal of good, though not to a degree that merits the traditional praise associated with international volunteerism.



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## APPENDIX A

### LIST OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

#### Participating Host Organizations

##### Peru

1. Máximo Nivel
2. LAFF (Latin American Foundation for the Future)
3. Girls Sports Works

##### Ecuador

4. Rotary Club Quito Valle Interoceánico
5. Fundación Hermano Miguel
6. Fundación Jutan Sacha
7. Servicio Ignacio de Voluntariado, SIGVOL
8. Casa Victoria
9. Junior Achievement
10. Fundación Cristo de Miravalle
11. Fudrine
12. Fundación ABEI (Amigos Benefactores de Enfermos Incurables)

#### Participating International Volunteers

1. A. Female, USA
2. B. Female, USA
3. C. Female, USA
4. D. Female USA
5. E. Female, New Zealand
6. F. Female, Australia
7. G. Female, Australia
8. H. Female, England
9. I. Male, USA
10. J. Male, USA
11. K. Male, USA
12. L. Male, USA
13. M. Male, England
14. N. Male, Canada

#### Supplementary Interview

1. Wilson Perez, PhD (Professor of Economics at Universidad San Francisco de Quito)

## APPENDIX B

### HOST ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Organization Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Name \_\_\_\_\_ Role in Organization \_\_\_\_\_

The following questions will serve as the foundation for a casual, conversation-style interview. Please expect the interview to take between 15-30 minutes to complete.

1. Does your organization receive any government funding or any other funds from non-governmental organizations?
2. How does your organization assess community needs and organize volunteer assignments?
3. Volunteers in Peru often feel that the impact of their volunteer project is minimal or not experienced in the immediate. Why do you think this is a common thought? What is your personal opinion on this matter?
4. What are some challenges your agency faces in addressing community needs and carrying out volunteer project?
5. What would you consider the top community needs in Cusco?
6. In general, what creates for the most beneficial volunteer experience for both the volunteer and the community?
7. How does your organization gauge the efficacy and success of its volunteer projects?
8. Is there any other information that you would like to share concerning our personal thoughts on the efficacy of international volunteerism?

*Further questions could include those prompted from personal observations and from the progression of our discussion on certain subjects.*

**APPENDIX C**

**HOST ORGANIZATION INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE**

**(SPANISH)**

1. ¿Cual es el enfoque de los programas de su organización?
2. ¿Recibe su organización fondos del gobierno o otros fondos de ONGs? ¿De dónde su organización recibe financiamiento?
3. ¿Cómo su organización evalúa/ identifica las necesidades del comunidad para sus programas y proyectos?
4. ¿Que tipos de proyectos su organización dirige?
5. ¿Cómo es su organización organizado con respecto a quien identifica las necesidades y quien implementa y organiza los programas?
6. A veces voluntarios se siente que sus proyectos de voluntariado no tiene un gran impacto o que los resultados no son significantes. ¿Por qué usted cree que este es común?
7. ¿Que son algunos dificultades que enfrenten su organización? ¿Su organización ha experimentado dificultades en el proceso de abordar y llevar a cabo los proyectos de voluntariado?
8. ¿Qué te parece son las necesidades principales o las más urgentes aquí en Quito?
9. En general, que crea una experiencia beneficiar por tanto los voluntarios como la comunidad?
10. ¿Que opina usted sobre la eficacia de voluntarismo en general en Ecuador?
11. ¿Que hace el gobierno para ayudar con el desarrollo del país? o ¿Qué es el papel del gobierno ecuatoriano en el desarrollo de comunidades pobres?

**APPENDIX D**

**VOLUNTEER INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE**

Name:

Home country

Placement:

Duration of service:

Language ability:

How do you perceive your utility at our placement site?

Where you satisfied with your volunteer experience?

As a volunteer, what do you think you could have done differently at your placement to make better use of your time?

What frustrated you the most about your placement?

How did your language ability affect your service?

How much did you travel during your service? How often did you skip placement?

Log of observations and conversations with volunteer:

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