RESEARCH BRIEF

A SUMMARY OF CSD'S CURRENT RESEARCH AND FELLOWS PROGRAM

International Volunteer Service: Research and Trends

International Volunteer Service (IVS) is the theme of the Center for Social Development's (CSD) civic service research brief this month. In this section, we provide an overview of research on IVS and share findings from CSD Fellows' research in different countries.

From a 2003 global assessment of civic service, CSD found that international service may be the most prevalent form of service worldwide (McBride et. al, 2003). Of the 210 identified programs in 57 countries, 124 programs could be considered international or transnational service, which we define as an organized period of engagement that is sponsored by public or private organizations in which someone makes recognized and valued contributions to society outside his or her home country with no or minimal monetary compensation (see McBride and Daftary, 2005). This is in spite of the fact that international service is the least researched; for example, we know less about it than we do national service or service-learning. As a result, CSD has made the promotion of research on international service a top priority in order to support program decision-making and policy development.

In 2005, CSD partnered with the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) in the UK to host a conference entitled International Service in the Context of Globalization. At this conference, practitioners and researchers convened to assess the state of knowledge on IVS. Select papers from this conference were published as an issue of Voluntary Action (http://www.ivr.org.uk/voluntaryaction20.htm). CSD has also made the study of IVS one of the funding priorities of the Fellows Program.
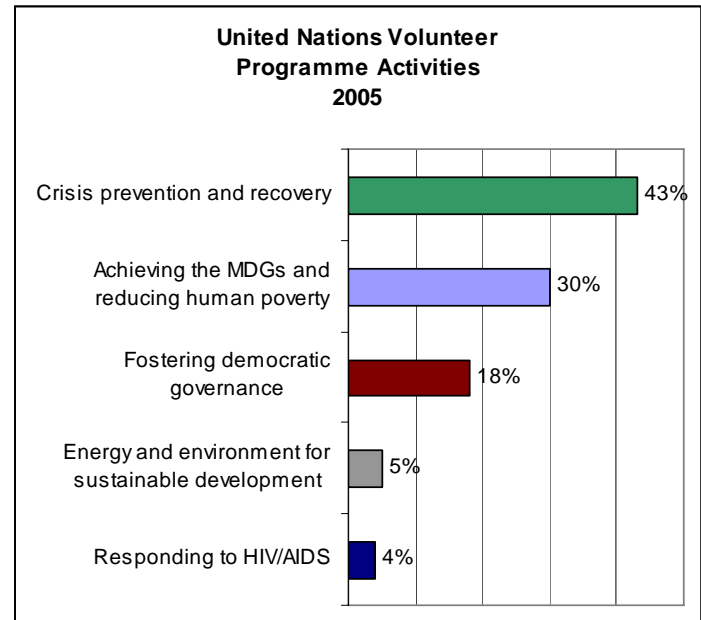

Figure 1. Numbers are based on UNDP 2004 – 2007 funding years. Source: United Nations Volunteer InfoBase. More information available at: http://www.unv.org/infobase/anrep/2006/UNV_AR05_statistics.pdf

Five of CSD's Research Fellows are studying international service. The diversity of IVS programs is considerable in terms of format and function. While some IVS programs focus on broad economic and social development goals with volunteers sponsored by governments, others are placed by nongovernmental organizations to work in partnership with local communities to foster cultural understanding and awareness. Preliminary findings from CSD research, notably Sherraden and Benítez (2003) and from the Fellows' studies suggest a direction for future research by providing contextual understanding of the status of international volunteer service worldwide.

Although a wide range of programs are present across the globe, little is known about the status of IVS programs and their impact on the

volunteers and the host communities especially (McBride et al., 2003; Perry & Imperial, 2001; Smith & Elkin, 1981; Woods, 1981). In addition, the differential impact of varying forms of program operation is unknown. Sherraden (2006) has suggested that most IVS programs are funded and operated by wealthy countries. These countries also tend to send more volunteers abroad, which may further contribute to imbalances in volunteer placements (Sherraden, 2006).

In a presentation delivered at the Seventh International Society for Third Sector Research Conference in Bangkok, CSD Fellow Peter Devereux (2006) explored the different roles for international volunteers as well as the positive and negative impacts of the many forms of volunteer aid available to beneficiaries and host communities. Devereux (2006) concluded that, considering the focus of the MDGs, IVS offers a plausible, creative, and empowering way of mobilizing people globally for development based on trust and understanding. As the nature and scope of volunteering worldwide changes in response to globalization, impact research will become increasingly important. New trends in international volunteering include a growing number of diverse organizations engaged in sending volunteers (e.g. businesses, clubs, and religious congregations) and an increase in the number of programs focused on short-term exchanges such as "volunteer tourism" (Development Initiatives, 2004).

Current data available from United Nations Volunteers (UNV) shows that functional areas implemented by formal programs generally center on crisis prevention and recovery. Currently, 45% of UNV Programs are aimed at crisis prevention and recovery, while 30% of these programs focus on achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and reducing poverty (Figure 1).

However, there is limited data available on the total number of non-US international volunteers and types of program activities promoted by transitional countries and informal organizations.

The current census on the number of US volunteers serving abroad shows that approximately 995,086 Americans reported volunteering internationally at least once in 2005—an increase of over 100,000 volunteers from 2004 (Lough, 2006). Lough notes that despite this increase, the majority of volunteers (65%) spent less than two weeks in service abroad.

Furthermore, the impact and effectiveness of IVS programs in addressing development issues remain unknown (Rieffel and Zalud, 2006). Even less is known about service programs in transitional countries. In the case of Mongolia, CSD Fellows Erdenechimeg and Gantumur (2005) note that, although IVS programs have existed in the country for many years, very few studies have been conducted on the effectiveness and impact of IVS programs on their host communities.

Erdenechimeg and Gantumur's (2005) study investigated the benefits of the NUNV Program of Mongolia for both the volunteers and the communities they served. They conducted face-to-face interviews with former volunteers and led community focus groups to assess possible program impact at the individual and community level. The study found that the NUNV program contributed to volunteers' personal growth in terms of gaining work experience and skills and increasing their self-confidence and self-efficacy (Erdenechimeg & Gantumur, 2005). In addition, some volunteers demonstrated increased tolerance towards minority and vulnerable groups, cultural awareness, and more participation in civic activities in the communities they served.

In the project titled "Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence," CSD Fellow Alvino Fantini also explores the themes of cultural awareness and cross-cultural exchange as powerful constructs in IVS research. In his pilot project, Fantini examined the intercultural outcomes of participants in the Federation for the Experiment in International Living (FEIL) and their hosts. The results from this pilot project indicate that long-term volunteering programs provide a life-altering experience to participants by improving their language skills and their civic engagement. Preliminary findings of this research effort contribute to the general knowledge in the field of intercultural education regarding international and intercultural efforts. Currently, however, the field lacks assessment tools designed to measure intercultural competence.

CSD's work in this area and these examples of CSD Fellows' research highlight interesting findings and implications for a research and policy agenda on IVS. Much remains to be known, and leadership is needed so the field can move forward effectively. The Brookings Institution in Washington, DC, has begun an effort to expand IVS and improve service quality, capacity, and positive impacts. CSD is leading the research agenda for the Brookings initiative and, in collaboration with international research partners, aims to assess the forms and functions of IVS worldwide in 2007, providing a global view of this phenomenon. Through this international coalition, CSD will also identify directions for impact research. Views from the field are welcome. Please contact *Maricelly Daltro* (mdaltro@wustl.edu) for more information about this research.

ARTICLE OF THE MONTH

Globalisation and international service: A development perspective
David Lewis, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics.

This article looks at international volunteer service in relation to ideas about globalization and development. It includes a critique of globalization and of current forms of international development. The study also describes the evolution of international volunteering into a "diverse, highly professionalized, evolving and essentially complex activity involving a wide range of issues and different kinds of organization and individual."

Abstract from *Voluntary Action* – Vol 7, #2, edited by Amanda Moore McBride, Angela Ellis Paine, Justin Davis Smith, and Margaret Sherraden. Full article is available at
http://www.ivr.org.uk/voluntaryaction20.htm

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