

# Exploring the local community's perception of the role of international volunteering in Kibera slum in Nairobi

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## Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore the local community's perception of the role of international volunteering in the Kibera slum in Nairobi. The qualitative research design was used and in-depth semi-structured individual interviews with 7 members of local community were conducted. The findings indicated overall positive perception related to individual overseas volunteers; however the views varied about the practice and accountability of volunteering organization. The main role associated with the international volunteering was seen in material/financial help, followed by free service provision and cross-cultural learning opportunities. The findings also identified the need for more effective international volunteer programmes aimed to empower the local community instead of creating the dependencies from international aid.

## Introduction

UNV (2011, p. 4) identifies three assessment criteria in order to classify the certain action as an act of volunteerism. The action has to involve free will, it has to be non-pecuniary and the benefit to others is essential. In the past decade volunteering has become very popular among the various groups of society. People can volunteer according to their abilities and to their areas of interest. The opportunities vary from multiple ranges of domestic initiatives to international practices that have greatly expanded through the establishment of state-supported organizations in 1950s-1970s (Comhlámh, 2014). In recent years the state-supported organizations have been supplemented by rapidly growing numbers of private agencies that offer shorter overseas volunteer placements lasting between a week and several months. There are a number of studies that have been done to evaluate the experiences of volunteers, however, the experiences of communities in host destinations have not been examined enough. Therefore, this research will aim to explore the role of the international volunteering and the effectiveness of this practice from a local community's perspective in the Kibera slum..



## Method

### Design

The qualitative research design was chosen as the most appropriate and naturalistic approach to investigate and to understand the communities' opinions on a particular matter within their own social environment. Semi-structured interviews were selected as the most suitable tool to provide an in-depth understanding of the local community's experiences.

### Participants

The purposive sampling was used to identify the possible research participants. The sample consisted of 7 individuals that complied to chosen criteria.

### Procedure

The interviews took place in the Kibera area and in Nairobi during January, 2015. The importance of appropriate appearance was taken into account according to Kenyans' cultural norms and religious beliefs. The greetings and the simple phrases in local Swahili language was learned to establish rapport. The average length of an interview was between 20 and 30 minutes.

### Ethics

The importance of ethical principles was recognized and the respect and sensitive manner to cultural differences was maintained throughout the research process.

## Results

The interpretation of data led to identification of four themes: **volunteers – hope when 'locals don't bother'; volunteers and the value of their work; role of sending organization;** and **expectations - dependency.**

## Discussion

The purpose of this study was to lessen the gap in current knowledge about the host community's experiences and opinions of international volunteering. This research aimed to explore the host community's perception of the role of international volunteering in the Kibera slum in Nairobi. The findings identified five roles associated with international volunteering: **role of material/financial support; of service provision; role of cross-cultural learning opportunities; role of a medium between Kibera and the West;** and **role in creating dependency.**

### Limitations

The thesis limitation can be seen by the fact that the sample of research consisted of female participants only.

### Recommendations

Further research would be required to investigate the possible impacts of mass media on the local community.

### Conclusion

The potential contribution of this study is seen in the added knowledge about life in the Kibera slum, which can be used as a starting point to build awareness and responsibility among the future volunteers.

## References

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