INITIATION VOLUNTEERING: YOUTH WORK-CAMPS AT THE CORE OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND COMMITMENT

« Short-term initiation volunteering (IV) is an educational action that aims at developing local and global citizenship of participants through intercultural exchange and through collective, solidarity action within the framework of public interest. » France Volontaires

This volunteering accounts for the most significant share in the entire French volunteering system. It is thus a major stake for France Volontaires. Developing quality commitment towards international volunteering & solidarity is its aim, and with this perspective, France Volontaires rubs shoulders with IV stake-holders.

This kind of volunteering contributes productively for the betterment of living conditions of inhabitants in host countries through the building of infrastructure, reforestation and literacy campaigns... But most importantly, it serves the purpose of giving another perspective to local youth so that they get an opportunity to be a part of an enriching intercultural exchange.

The numerous activists and stakeholders in France of these youth & solidarity initiatives (Scouts & Guides of France, Ecole de France, Eclareuses & Eclareurs de France, Leo Lagrange, Ligue de l'Enseignement, Ritimo, CCFD Terre Solidaire, Fonjef/Ministry of Foreign Affairs) are the driving forces of this dynamic operation alongside France Volontaires.

France Volontaires assists & accompanies IV participants around the world through its network of Volunteer Spaces -VS- (25 countries). Our teams:

- maintain a regular follow-up while the camp is in its functional phase.
- train the future team-leaders (for example promoting an ambiance of intercultural exchange amongst groups of youth).

France Volontaires offers customized support to organisations so that they can define and achieve their objectives for the youth work-camp (identifying partner bodies, training of host organisations, orientation for participating groups, follow-up & feed-back visits, conducting de-briefing sessions at the end of the project). Support may also be provided to local governments within the framework of a specific contractual agreement with France Volunteers.

In order to facilitate a closer link with participants and organisations, their activities, their day-to-day functioning, their experiences, and in order to obtain a systemic vision regarding the evolution of dynamics within this field, France Volontaires organizes field-visits to work-camps in various countries for the purpose of forging a meaningful partnership. In 2012, this project comprised 250 working days (excluding time devoted to data analysis and treatment, and feedback to stakeholders), with variable mobilizations depending on Volunteer Spaces. This amounted to a full time intervention of almost 1 – 3 people. 166 work camps which figured in these field-visits were subjected to an in-depth analysis. The result of this analysis is given here below:
ANALYSIS OF SUMMER FIELD-TRIPS 2012 TO VARIOUS YWC’s

General Structure: Taking into account initiation volunteering dynamics through each Volunteer Space

- 14 countries
- 23 people on the job (6 RIYWC: Reinforcement In-charge for Youth work-camps, 9 VSIC: Volunteer Space In-charge, 5 COMIN: Communication In-charge, 2 National representatives & 1 external resource)
- 166 documented work-camps (out of which 97 took place in the 5 countries studied in 2011)
- 156 Sending Organisations (SO’s), 162 Host Organisations (HO’s), 2455 participants (43% North / 57% South)
- Camp duration: 3 weeks – 1 month

6 Volunteer Spaces with a dedicated human resource in YWC’s. 77%, i.e. 128 YWC’s visited

- Togo: 18%
- Senegal: 15%
- Benin: 13%
- Maroc: 13%
- Burkina: 11%
- Madagascar: 7%

Average 21 YWC’s visited per Volunteer Space, Extremes 12/30

8 Volunteer Spaces without a dedicated human resource in YWC’s. 23%, i.e. 38 YWC’s visited

- Cameroun: 7%
- Vietnam: 4%
- Cambodia: 3%
- Peru: 3%
- Haiti: 2%
- Burundi: 2%
- Congo: 1%
- Egypt: 1%

Average 5 YWC’s visited per Volunteer Space, Extremes 2/11

STAKEHOLDERS: Very diverse organisations, young participants, male-female imbalance, high staff-to-participants ratios, multiculturalism

Sending & Host Organisations

- Predominantly Associations (French 83%, Local 76%).
- ... who organize work-camps occasionally (French 43%, Local 48%).

To be considered:

- It is necessary to obtain trustworthy information on the "occasional" or "specialized" nature of organisations. This is a key element to improve support/advisory procedures (being able to have diverse strategies).

- It is important to track the increase of people going on mission without any Sending Organisation. An undeniable phenomena constantly on the rise (limited capacities of sending organisations, an increased desire for commitment, non-subsidised volunteering now possible in host countries).
Participants and staff-to-participants ratio:
- A first-time experience in the field of International Solidarity (87% French / 71% Local).
- Age group comprising mostly 16-25 year olds (93% French, 85% Local).
- A majority of women among the French partipants, (58%) and a majority of men among the local participants (57%).
- 17% Multicultural camps (host country + France + other nationalities) with 26 nationalities identified.
- 15 participants per camp.
- A good staff-to-participants ratio with 3 instructors / camp (1 per 7 French participants & 1 per 4 local participants).

ToFundOfThE Project: A n imbalance between France and the host country

- Imbalanced financial participation between stakeholders from the North and from the South, which poses a challenge to partnerships.
- Huge imbalance as far as youth participation is concerned (93% /18%), which requires contemplation, as there are links between financial participation, implication, appropriation and social recognition.
- Situation in France:
  - Balanced participation of local governments & private donors. These stakeholders are more significant funders than the state.
  - Financial participation of youth is quasi-systematic.

To be considered:
- Consequences of group-composition in managing the camp (specific ways of functioning in terms of support and staff-to-participants ratios).
- Information and awareness campaigns to increase women participation in the South are a necessity.
- Qualification and experience of instructors requires scrutiny for summer 2013.
- Shouldn’t a “quality norm” as far as qualifications and experience of local instructors be defined in consultation with H.O’s (comparable with norms applicable in France)?

- On site local participation is mostly in kind.
- Budget of less than 5000 euros (24%) and between 5000 and 10,000 euros (35%).

To be considered:
- Work out a strategy alongside the host organisations & their partners so as to consider financial participation as not only one of the principles but also as a educational aim of youth work-camp (YWWC), for both French and local participants.
One major central theme in conformity with the main field related to participants’ skills and know-how.

A secondary theme “rehabilitation construction”, a basis for coining the term “youth-camps” a few years back, but which is no more the major central theme.

Some tangential themes that exist since a few years, and which stand testimony to the commitment of the YWC’s towards diversification processes.

To be considered:

What could be the role of Volunteer Spaces in identifying and sharing particularly innovative themes that are worth developing (for example, peace & human rights, economy & local trade, leisure)?
FRANCE VOLONTAIRES: relatively unknown, services seldom utilised yet valued

- 39% of participants know FV.

- 33% of those who know FV have solicited its services (13% among all the participants).

Services solicited can be categorised in 3 major sets:
- practical organisation (logistical information, visa & accommodation) 36%.
- services directly linked to the personal commitment (information on the organisation), 48%.
- preparation (training, cultural information) 7%.

- A paradox: Participants who have been sent from organisations specialising in work-camps have utilised services of VS's more than those participants who are linked with organisations that organize work-camps occasionally (33% vs 28%).

- Quality of service is highly valued.

To be considered

- How do Sending Organisations (SO's) and Host Organisations (HO's) inform participants about the existence of Volunteer Spaces?

- Participants are not the only stakeholders involved. Thus lack of acquaintance among participants does not mean a lack of acquaintance among host and sending organisations.

- Field-visits are also meant to serve as a tool to inform the stakeholders of the role and activities of the Volunteer Space.
EDUCATIONAL DIMENSION: A large gap between French and local stakeholders

- A big gap concerning key elements:
  - Seniority of groups (> 6 months: 66%/29%) with consequences on preparation time and thus on the educational and instructive dimensions. Seniority of the group and frequency of communication seem to be linked.
  - Pre-project training (74% against 45%). The determining element might be the compulsory character of this training (91% of cases). In case it is not compulsory, some participants undergo training of their own.
  - Analysis and assessment at the end of the project (quasi-systematic with French participants, and occasionally with local participants).
  - Consecrating time for contemplation on the experiences concerning the camp is still not systematic (70%).
  - When a post-camp period for analysing and re-reading the experience exists, it seems to be linked with the existence of a SO, and consequently to the existence of a team-leader who is capable of managing this time.

To be considered
- 5 stages should be respected in order to assure collective and individual learning. Their execution is based upon 2 major elements:
  - Methods (by training team-leaders).
  - Time management (constituting groups at the earliest possible stage of the project).
- The case of people getting involved without a sending organisation. This requires ample thought during the preparatory phase.
  - Is this a viable proposal in France with specialised organisations (either in the form of special training, or as participation in an already functional training programme)?
  - What does it imply for the host organisations in the start-up phase of projects?
- Importance of defining strategies that diminish the number of participants who engage without prior training (26% French / 55% Local).

WAYS IN WHICH PROJECTS ARE COHERENT WITH THE LOCAL CONTEXT AND RESPOND TO LOCAL CHALLENGES

- The existence of one more partner apart from the HO in the majority of cases seems to be an advantage ("each job suits the person who masters it", leading to sustainability).
- In 95% of the cases, all work carried out within framework of YWC's is centered around public interest.
- More than 1/3rd of the projects are not part of a larger project, which poses the problem of sustainability (isolated actions).
- In 89% of the cases the initiative to identify the work that needs to be accomplished is undertaken by the local partner, whether alone or with other stakeholders.
- Local participants almost never take initiative for the actions that need to be undertaken. (Only 1 example out of 166 YWC's).

To be considered:
- The local context is systematically presented at the start of the project.
- In 68% of the work-camps visited, other local stakeholders took part in the activities.

- Collaboration with host structures needs to be reinforced in order to reduce the number of work-camps which don't contribute to a global scheme or a bigger project.
PARTNERSHIP EFFICACY FOR PROJECT BUILDING

- Prior communication between partners for project definition is a constant (by mail, by telephone). The content of this communication revolves mainly around logistics (61%). Paradoxically, aspects linked with the basic tenets of IV's appear much less in this communication (37%).

- During the work-camp, two major modes prevail in decision-making:
  - an inclusive mode. This mode accounts for a small share (27%) and it takes into consideration all stakeholders of the project in decision making, especially the local participants.
  - an exclusive mode. It accounts for a bigger share (73%). One or more stakeholders are excluded from decision-making. It is to be noted that local participants are kept at a distance pretty often in this second decision mode.

- 20% of the projects have no definition of common aims; consequently it's not possible to talk about partnership.

- 54% of the camps visited fall within a stable partnership (1 year or more).

To be considered

- Developing support for the stakeholders to construct a fruitful partnership. The partnership quality is one of the keys for the project's success.

- Exemplary guidance (the image given by the partnership and the relationship with participants).

EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE

- Exchanges between groups before the beginning of the camp are low (25%).

- Devoting time specifically to intercultural exchange is necessary. But in 31% of the cases, this specifically designated time does not exist.

- 88% of camps visited had organised discovery trips to local heritage sites for participants. In 2/3rd of these discovery trips local participants accompanied their French counterparts.

- The duration of these field-trips for discovering local heritage sites is between 1 to 5 days for a project that lasts 1 to 3 weeks. One observes that a fourth week generally doubles up the duration of these discovery trips. Globally speaking the duration of these local heritage discovery trips varies from 1/3rd to 1/4th of the total project duration.

- The fact that 43% of French participants live amongst themselves limits intercultural exchange.

To be considered:

- Interaction between groups of participants in the beginning must be as systematic as possible (aims of youth/participant implication). Interaction needs at least two people.

- Accommodation is not only logistical in nature, but it also has an angle of cultural exchange to it. In this respect, being lodged in families within a binomial framework seems to be appreciated by French participants.

- Knowledge about the difference between cultural awareness and intercultural exchange.
IMPRESSIONS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

- Participants are satisfied of their experience, in spite of a few drawbacks.

Reasons enumerated:
- First topic of satisfaction is intercultural exchange. It's failure is the first topic of dissatisfaction.
- Discovering a different environment and/or cultural reality.

For information:
- Elements put forward to justify the reply "Rather yes" (8 replies): management and atmosphere, discovering a foreign environment, an intercultural encounter and purpose of the camp.
- The reply "not at all" (3 replies): intercultural encounter and project-management.

France Volontaires
6, rue Truillot - BP 220
94203 Ivry-sur-Seine Cedex
01 53 14 20 30
www.france-volontaires.org