

Challenges in International Development

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Program Development

From 2014-2016, I volunteered with Peace Corps The Gambia. During my service, I noticed a lack of mental health resources available in country. I proposed a GIS project aimed at providing training to their Volunteer Support Network. However, when I began interviewing current volunteers, nearly everyone attributed their stress to

“doubting why we are here in the first place.”

My project refocused to collecting feedback on the perception of the international aid organization as seen by the workers themselves. This was done in collaboration with the preceding volunteer in the village of Geniya, and our shared counterpart, Saikou Nyassi. What we found was a lot of questions of **what makes practice efficacious and ethical**. This experience was integral to my future aspirations of practicing interpersonal therapy with diverse populations domestically and abroad.



The Gambia

The smallest country in continental Africa, The Gambia hosts **dozens of international aid organizations** within its 4,361 square miles. One of its oldest partners, Peace Corps, has been operating within The Gambia since 1967, just 6 years after the global organization was founded. Volunteers serve in the Agriculture, Education, and Health sectors.

Global Field Agency

Peace Corps main goals are (1) to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for **trained** men and women; (2) to help **promote a better understanding of Americans** on the part of the peoples served; and (3) to help **promote a better understanding of other peoples** on the part of Americans.

Where We Fall Short

The average volunteer is an upper-middle class white person, newly graduated from university. The shadow of this description is that they likely have **limited experience** in the work they will demonstrate; they **are not reflective of the diversity of Americans**; and while in service travel is discouraged, thereby encouraging a **limited view of the country and people** about which they are later asked to speak as experts. **This question of intention, efficacy, and ethics causes much doubt and dissonance, and was the most reported source of stress for volunteers.**

Where We Succeed

It is an immersive two-year experience that allows an individual to gain **massive amounts of perspective**. But perhaps development is happening primarily for volunteers, rather than the host country.



Advice for those going Abroad

- Interrogate **why you want to go abroad** in the first place, and what you might contribute.
- Partner **intentionally and ethically** with communities, and seek training beforehand.
- **Remain open** to new directions.



Connections

- **701 Practice in International Social Work.** I learned to think critically about global practices and impacts, and how we might alter the paths of those that are problematic.
- **560 Introduction to Community Organization, Management and Policy Evaluation Practice.** This course taught me to consider the broad and specific impacts of organizations, and when to intervene.

Lessons Learned

- Adopt a consistent focus on **ethical community partnership**.
- Pay attention to **institutional knowledge**; the way forward should be informed by appropriate measures and thorough **program evaluation**.
- **Aid organizations should be working with the goal of making themselves unnecessary.**

Skills Developed

- **Cross-cultural partnership.**
- **Multi-lingual, multi-party meeting facilitation.**
- **Sustainability Evaluation.**
- **Qualitative Data Collection.**



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