

Correspondence

Dear Editor,

Christopher Brown has a point of view and it is one which is at least partially shared by some of the more radical western aid lobbyists. However, one cannot help thinking that in his own way he is another middle class westerner interpreting the supposed views of developing countries on technical assistance. My experience leads me to think that there are as many varied approaches in developing countries as there are from western commentators.

I think he does the young volunteers a disservice in suggesting that they are naïve or act on the basis of a guilt complex or for reasons of escapism. Realism seems to be the dominant characteristic of young people today with a healthy admixture of idealism.

Whether a young person is sent overseas as a "volunteer" or "co-operant" is perhaps not too important. The context in which he goes overseas is. The context of the overseas volunteer movement includes the facts that:

- (a) the starting point is a request from a developing country and not the recruitment of volunteers.
- (b) the benefit is mutual. The host country receives some help it needs whilst at the same time providing opportunities for "development" to young people who are selected to go overseas. The volunteer movement represents a welcome exception to the usual giver-receiver aspects of aid.
- (c) technical assistance on contract is in short supply. Volunteers provide a useful and economical form of supplementary assistance.
- (d) returning volunteers make a significant contribution to a wider understanding of aid issues in their home countries.

If a larger number of older and more experienced people were available to serve in developing countries, there would be fewer requests for volunteers. However, as the number of requests for volunteers tends to increase the indications are that developing countries find them useful. In my view most of them give of

their best with the intention of making a small contribution to both raising living standards and a deeper understanding of people and problems in the world community.

Finally I want to correct an error of fact. The Co-ordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service is not a subsidiary agency of UNESCO but has consultative status with it. It is an independent non-governmental committee comprising voluntary agencies in both Eastern and Western Europe and also includes member societies from both developed and developing countries. The group which drew up the Charter to which he refers was representative of all these segments. There is widespread support for a U.N. volunteer programme, the diversion of opinion only relates to structural aspects due to the complexities of centralised U.N. administration. I commend Christopher Brown to a reading of the last Co-Co. Conference Report on multilateral volunteers and to the U.N. Feasibility Study.

Yours sincerely,

Philip Zealey,
Secretary, British Volunteer
Programme

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Dear Sir,

Contrary to Philip Zealey's suggestion that I was "... interpreting the supposed views of the developing countries on technical assistance", I was expressing my own views. I said as much in the first footnote. People from the developing countries can much better speak for themselves. Where I did appeal to views expressed in the Third World, I carefully tried to identify the sections of opinion concerned. The criticisms I made about the ethic, certain motivations, and the larger context of volunteer involvement are the ones I see as central.

The good work done by voluntary agencies had already been stated by Bernard Llewellyn. Their record is one all of us recognise. As to the "facts" (a), (b) and (c) Philip Zealey outlines, these accord with my first two conclusions, although the emphasis differs. I am in sufficient agreement with (d) to have taken an active interest in the British Volunteer Programme over the past year, believing that Westerners should listen to, and be educated by Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans.

Whether I have done the volunteer a "disservice" by raising some less comforting considerations, which from my observation of Canadians in Tanzania and Zambia are important factors (perhaps not applicable to British volunteers?) is, at least, debatable. In certain instances volunteer organisations have been requested by host governments to cut back their programmes; in some cases they have even been asked to pack their bags and leave. I think this should give cause for reviewing both the premises of volunteerism, and the volunteer operations, as well as the whole spectrum of technical assistance. It was in the spirit of greater "realism" that I related volunteer efforts to the highly relevant underlying issues at stake.

Finally my thanks for Philip Zealey's correction regarding the status of CoCo.

Yours sincerely,

Christopher Brown