



**AUSTRALIAN
BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS**

PERSPECTIVES

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STRENGTHENING BUSINESSES AND, THROUGH THEM, COMMUNITIES



Craft Beauty employees during a participatory exercise to draw out changes which followed Australian volunteers' assignments

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THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF AUSTRALIAN BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS

Demonstrating how international volunteering contributes to longer-term community outcomes is a challenge and is something the international volunteering community has grappled with for a long time and continues to do so. ABV is no exception and in June this year, we embarked on an in-depth evaluation of some long-standing partnerships in Cambodia, the Philippines and Vietnam. This allowed us to put our Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework to the test and we found that not only do initial assignments result in improved business and organisational skills, our longer-term work with host organisations has led to increased productivity and capacity to offer services, cost savings and the employment of additional staff. We have witnessed how the steady income growth

of social enterprises and community learning centres, for example, has had the multiplier effect of families having greater access to education.

The first article in this issue describes how we seek to measure long-term change based on our theory of change which is embedded in MERI. Next, readers will find a series of infographics which illustrate how our volunteers contributed to change in 2015-16. The remainder of this issue is given over to three articles about the long-term organisational and community impact we observed with our partners.

Sarah O'Connor
CEO

HOW ABV HAS SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS

Demonstrating how international volunteering contributes to longer-term community outcomes is a challenge and is something the international volunteering community has grappled with for a long time and continues to do so. In order to better understand the process, ABV has developed a theory of change as part of its Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Improvement (MERI) Framework. The theory seeks to explain how capacity building assignments undertaken by expert volunteers can contribute to long-term community outcomes associated with the alleviation of poverty, such as improved and sustainable economic and social conditions.



ABV's Thu Minh Tran (3rd from left) talking with homestay owners from Vietnam's Mai Chau Valley about the impact of volunteers under AVID program

To understand whether this theory of change was unfolding in practice, in mid-2016 ABV undertook an in-depth evaluation of assignments and changes at six host organisations in three countries; Bahay Tuluyan and GIYFF Farm School in the Philippines; Craft Beauty, COHED and KOTO in Vietnam; and SAMIC Limited in Cambodia.

These organisations were not intended to be representative but were chosen because they were involved in private

sector development activities and had hosted three or more ABV-registered volunteers.

To undertake evaluation, two ABV employees used participatory processes and interviews with representatives of host organisations and beneficiaries. These centred on participants' views about the most significant changes that had followed volunteer assignments, as well as the way the assignments were designed and implemented by the

volunteers. In using this method ABV was able to identify not only organisational change but communities with improved and sustainable economic and social conditions. Significantly ABV was also able to draw out clear evidence and firm opinions that the volunteers had contributed to these longer-term outcomes.

Through this evaluation exercise, ABV was able to identify several common features present in the design and implementation of most assignments that were important in bringing about the change we observed. The experience of the volunteers meant that they provided high level, strategic advice to host organisations and developed significant trust and respect from the counterparts, necessary for buy-in to the work. The volunteers also worked with senior management to build core business capacities of the organisations.

A key feature of our design is that volunteers are able to modify assignment objectives while on assignment. This contributed to capacity building needs being correctly identified, receptiveness to outside input by counterparts and the mutual understanding of working styles, and an understanding by counterparts of the relevancy of the assignment to their work and the broader organisation. As the assignments were delivered consecutively, each one complemented or built on previous work. Thus, subsequent assignments contributed to earlier learning being sustained and were designed in light of outputs, outcomes and knowledge gained from earlier assignments. Further, as assignments were short-term, the emphasis was on mentoring rather than 'doing the work' and encouraged the transfer of practical and relevant skills and knowledge using active learning methods.

Three of the case studies in this issue of Perspectives were produced as a result of the evaluation. The full evaluation report will be available shortly on ABV's website.

Foundational Activities

Ethical people-centred development projects and programs with business, government and community organisations are developed and promoted

Immediate Individual Outputs

Organisations have improved business and organisational skills

Intermediate Organisational Outcomes

Organisations have implemented sustainable business and organisational practices in their communities

Longer-term Community Outcomes

Communities have improved and sustainable economic and social conditions

The theory of change pillar in ABV's MERI Framework

INFOGRAPHIC DATA FOR EACH LEVEL IN ABV'S THEORY OF CHANGE

ABV's theory of change seeks to explain how expert volunteers contribute to long-term community outcomes. These infographics illustrate data ABV gathered for each level in its theory of change in 2015-16. They provide information about the foundational activities which ABV undertook to achieve its mission. They also illustrate immediate individual outputs, intermediate organisational outcomes and some longer-term community outcomes.



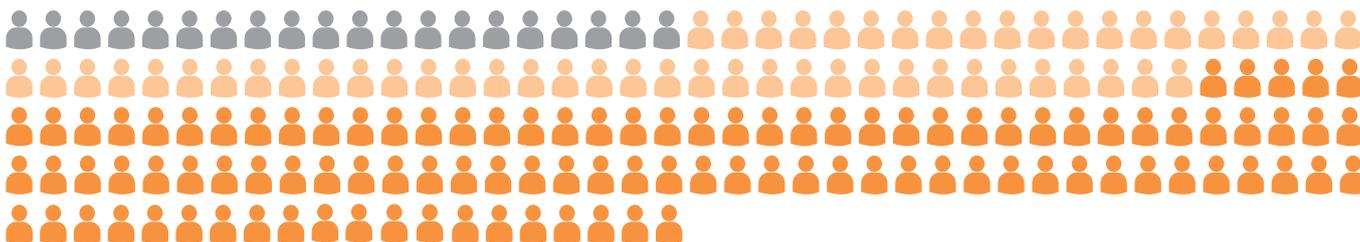
FOUNDATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Ethical people-centred development projects and programs with business, government and community organisations are developed and promoted.

Mobilisations by Country



ABV's people-centred development projects provided training and mentoring to at least 1873 people:



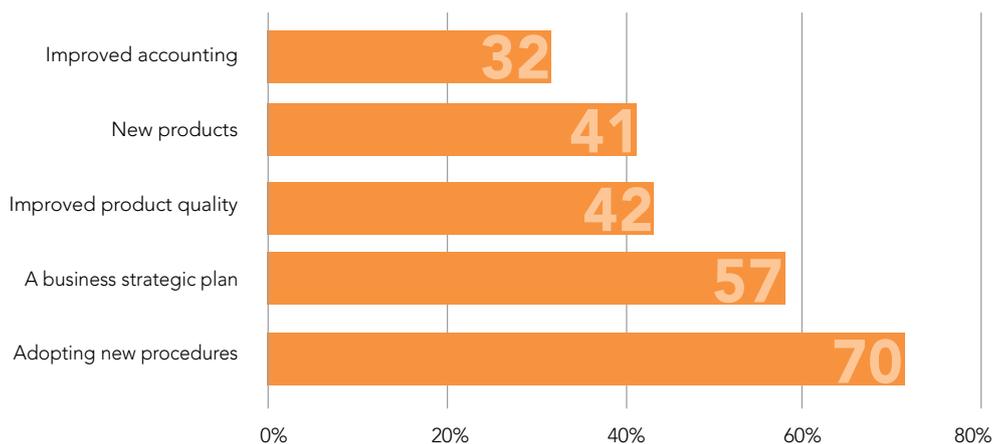
216 Counterparts 553 Staff 1104 Community Members



IMMEDIATE INDIVIDUAL OUTPUTS

Organisations have improved business and organisational skills.

Percentage of assignments which resulted in improvements to various business and organisation skills



Percentage of organisations reporting that the capacity building objectives of assignments were met



- 83 % Fully or mostly met
- 17 % Partially or limitedly met
- 0 % Not met



INTERMEDIATE ORGANISATIONAL OUTCOMES

Organisations have implemented sustainable business and organisational practices in their communities.

Organisations' views on likelihood that outcomes will be sustained



- 81 % Very and Highly Likely
- 18 % Likely
- 1 % Unlikely or Very Unlikely



14%

of projects resulted in the employment of additional staff



22%

of all assignments created cost savings



41%

of organisations reported increased staff morale



44%

or nearly half of all assignments increased productivity of the organisations worked with



50%

or half of all assignments increased the capacity of organisations to offer services



LONGER-TERM COMMUNITY OUTCOMES

Communities have improved and sustainable economic and social conditions.

Some examples reported in 2015-16

Six ethnic Thai community homestay businesses in Mai Chau Valley Vietnam have large increases in incomes with associated social benefits

Average monthly income from homestays



"These figures are very impressive and this success has been helped by good planning, good marketing and acceptable hospitality skills, and so the three volunteers have contributed to this." **Homestay program partner**

"Every time I receive a booking I am happy because I know it means I can afford for my children to go to school." **Homestay owner**

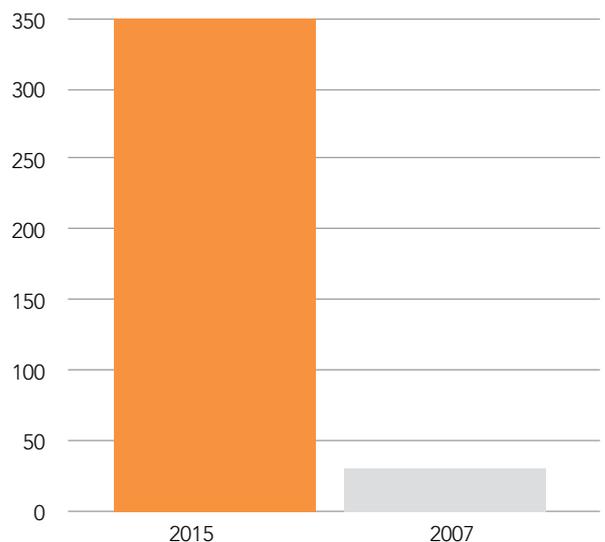
An IT business in Port Moresby PNG creates new employment and a steady income

"Previously we did not employ staff because we feared that we may not be able to pay them regularly because our income is not regular. In addition, we feared that if we trained them, they would 'steal' our skills and start their own companies. This was our greatest obstacle in growth. ABV's YES program enabled us to overcome that fear and we took the risk. The new staff member was able to generate steady monthly income and we are able employ two more this year."

Business co-owner

Students receive a quality education at a privately run Community Learning Centre in Jiwaka Province, PNG

Number of students attending the centre



"ABV's YES program was one of the factors which have helped make the Community Learning Centre a success... Other schools now compare themselves to the Learning Centre - by creating competition it is raising the standard of education in the whole region." **Learning Centre Director**

IN VIETNAM'S MAI CHAU VALLEY AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO IMPROVEMENTS IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

"Before we were only thinking traditionally; gathering things from the forest, and growing rice."

Mrs Tho is standing in front of her homestay where she regularly welcomes guests from around the world. "Now we think beyond that, and invest in our children's education. Now we want our children to stay in school."



Mrs Tho at her homestay

Mrs Tho and her husband are among the beneficiaries of a program by Hanoi-based not-for-profit COHED (Centre for Community Health and Development) to which three Australian volunteers have contributed their expertise through the Australian Volunteers for International Development program. Under COHED's program six ethnic Thai families were assisted to develop and run homestay businesses in the beautiful Mai Chau Valley region of northern Vietnam. The program has been very successful in bringing about positive change. To quote the COHED Director Dao Thi Mai Hoa, "the families' incomes have sky-rocketed, from nothing in 2013 to US\$423 per month in 2014, and US\$1116 per month in 2015." However, the program has not only brought about economic benefits. Four couples spoken to in mid-2016 said that in the previous three years their 'happiness' had increased significantly because they fought less over money, and because they enjoyed managing their homestays.

According to COHED, the program has also driven social change. Latrines are now used and there is better general hygiene as homestay owners know this is necessary to attract foreign guests. For Mrs Tho, the ability to send her children to school was the biggest change. "Every time I receive a booking I am happy because I know it means I can afford for my children to go to school".

Now a significant number of local people are opening their own homestays seeking to emulate the success of the original six families.

While the credit for these changes should go to COHED and to the families themselves, COHED acknowledges that the Australian volunteers made important contributions. The homestay project was part of COHED's strategy to become a leader in community based tourism development. Each of the Australian volunteers was selected because of the relevance of their skills and knowledge to this objective. Alistair Henchman, placed

in 2013 had experience in tourism project planning, Bradley Rae, placed in 2014, had experience in eco-tourism marketing, while Suzanne Duce, placed in 2015 had experience in hospitality management.

"COHED was very pleased with the three volunteers" says Director Mai Hoa. "We recognised that they had deep knowledge and experience. The three volunteers worked on three different areas but all were targeting community based tourism which enabled the COHED team to build up a comprehensive perspective of ... community based tourism." Mai Hoa attributes the success of the homestay program to COHED's in-depth understanding of the sector. Referring to the increase in homestay incomes she says, "(t)hese figures are very impressive and this success has been helped by good planning, good marketing and acceptable hospitality skills, and so the three volunteers have contributed to this."

COHED will soon host two additional Australian volunteers. These assignments will seek to build on earlier successes and help grow the community based tourism sector in Mai Chau. The aim will be to ensure that economic success is combined with positive social change, and the preservation of local culture and the environment.

The Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program is an Australian Government initiative. Alistair, Bradley and Suzanne's assignments were developed by Australian Business Volunteers who are working in consortium with Scope Global, a delivery partner of the AVID program.

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FOR INTERNATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

REPEAT VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS DRIVE GROWTH FOR SMALL BUSINESS IN RURAL ORIENTAL MINDORO PROVINCE, PHILIPPINES

Roscini Eugenio beams as she shows the building extension which has doubled the size of her bakery and grocery shop in Roxas on the Philippines island of Mindoro. "Dante's ideas and the skills he taught us were really important in making our business grow" she says. Australian volunteer Dante Tagle had worked with Roscini and her husband Estoy during three consecutive assignments through the Australian Volunteers for International Development program at the nearby *Gelacio I Yason Foundation Family Farm School*.

A key element of the School's curriculum is the Family Enterprise Program (FEP). This innovative program sees the school educating students about small business development, and working with students' families to build up feasible and sustainable businesses through training, mentoring and occasional soft loans. The Eugenios' bakery is one of the school's success stories.

Dante's three assignments were focused on building the Farm School's capacities in business education and social enterprise development, with a particular emphasis on strengthening the FEP. As part of his work on the FEP Dante mentored the Eugenio's on basic business management skills, going back to the bakery on each assignment.

"When we started four years ago the business was very small, with only a few items, but learning from Dante we were able to manage our finances well and come up with strategies to manage our capital" says Roscini. An example of the relatively basic but important changes the Eugenios made was to give set salaries to themselves as well as to their bakers and delivery person. Previously cash for daily expenses was taken directly from the shop's cash box with no accounting of income or expenses.

In the words of Mina Ballesteros, Director of the School, "this advice is quite simple but it helps a lot. Now they can really know what they are earning". For Roscini, "This was a big help because we were able to learn how to manage our capital. It's not mixed with our needs for the family, so we were able to make it grow and use it efficiently."



Thanks to Dante Tagle's 3 AVID assignments Roscini and Estoy Eugenio say their bakery business has doubled in size

Madam Ballesteros also believes that having repeat assignments can help maintain and reinforce lessons learned. "These sorts of business skills are difficult to master the first time. I would tell them Dante is coming, and he will look at what you are doing, so they were encouraged. Also sometimes you need that extra push so as to not backslide."

The progressive change in the Eugenio's bakery exemplifies how multiple short-term assignments by skilled business volunteers can generate change over time. The Eugenios's bakery was just one of many local small businesses, from banana plantations to organic rice farms, which benefited from Dante's assignments with the School. The improvements to these

businesses demonstrate how working with local community organisations on business projects can provide leverage to bring about change to the wider community.

Dante's assignments were delivered under the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program – an Australian Government initiative. Each assignment was developed by Australian Business Volunteers who are working in consortium with Scope Global, a delivery partner of the AVID program.



"Dante's ideas and the skills he taught us were really important in making our business grow"

VOLUNTEER ASSIGNMENTS CONTRIBUTE TO FAIR-TRADE BUSINESS' SUSTAINABILITY

Craft Beauty staff are in no doubt about the impact four Australian volunteer assignments have had on their organisation. From the use of Photoshop, to more focus on team-work, to the use of the design cycle for planning and improvement, the staff can list many significant changes which have been prompted by the volunteers the organisation has hosted.



Craft Beauty employees with a list of changes which have resulted from Australian volunteers' assignments

Craft Beauty is an independent NGO based in Hanoi, Vietnam which creates Vietnamese handicraft products under fair-trade conditions. It gives disadvantaged women the support and the opportunity to improve their standard of living by providing financial security and self-confidence through secure work, training and safe-conditions.

When first contacted in 2013, Craft Beauty management wanted to improve its efficiency as well as the quality and diversity of their handmade products. They also wanted a better understanding of international market trends and a marketing strategy. To address these needs a number of short-term volunteer assignments were developed and implemented under the Australian Volunteers for International Development program. One assignment undertaken by Australian volunteer Steven D'Elia in 2013 focused on marketing and business management, while the remaining three were delivered by Trish Hodgson in 2014 and 2016 and focused on the design and production process.

Steven built staff capacity in marketing and developed new marketing strategies

which are still in use. Three years later Craft Beauty staff also note how he inspired the organisation to be less hierarchical and to work as a team, and encouraged the establishment of company yoga sessions. In the words of the Vice Director Ms Hoai "With Steven teaching us the foundations of teamwork, we have learnt how to work effectively as a team."

Trish's earlier assignments focused on transferring technical skills such as using Photoshop in the design process. Her third assignment buttressed these skills with higher level theoretical design knowledge and skills, such as of the design cycle. According to Ms Hoai, having multiple short-term assignments helped the Craft Beauty team learn. "We think that short assignments are really efficient because we can concentrate and focus to learn from the training. Then we will practice and do ourselves. We put into practice what we have learnt."

Ms Hoai is also clear about the value the volunteers have provided to the organisation. "The biggest changes for our organisation are that we have reduced the cost of the sample process, and we can now make our own designs, and

also the image of the company is more professional."

In the last several years Craft Beauty has maintained growth at around 5%. For Ms Hoai this is to a considerable degree due to the efficiencies generated because of the volunteers' support. She considers 5% average growth to be a very good result when other similar organisations in Vietnam have been failing over the last several years. It is clear then that Trish and Steven have made an impact. By contributing to Craft Beauty's efficiency they have helped maintain the 45 women that Craft Beauty employs in sustainable, secure, and safe employment.

The Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program is an Australian Government initiative. Steven and Trish's assignments were developed by Australian Business Volunteers who are working in consortium with Scope Global, a delivery partner of the AVID program.



ABV is a proud member of the Australia – PNG, Australia-Pacific Islands, and the Australia-Fiji Business Councils

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