



**AUSTRALIAN
BUSINESS VOLUNTEERS**

**Australia in the Asian Century
Indonesia Strategy Submission
by
Australian Business Volunteers
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Strengthening businesses and, through them, communities

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INTRODUCTION

Australian Business Volunteers (ABV) is an international development agency with a focused mission to strengthen businesses and, through them, communities. We have a 32 year history of achieving this outcome by using expert volunteers to transfer skills and build the capacity of local businesses across Asia and the Pacific.

ABV works with its in-country partners to implement a program over a sustained period of time. We do this through a range of short-term assignments jointly scoped by our partners and ABV to meet the partner's specific organisational needs. Over time, follow up assignments by our volunteers continue to build the capacity of our partners, generating joint participation and sustainability when the program comes to an end.

For much of our 30 + year history, ABV has undertaken its work directly through the Australian Government's volunteer program, and since 2011, as a partner with Austraining International under AusAID's Australian Volunteers for International Development Program (AVID), delivering the short-term, business component. For this arm of our work, ABV draws its volunteers from our database of pre-qualified business experts who are typically mid-career or early retirement.

A second arm of our work is our Corporate Volunteer Program, whereby we partner with businesses through a corporate social responsibility initiative, utilising the expertise of their employees as volunteers.

A key example of this model is ABV's partnership with IBM to deliver its Corporate Services Corps and Executive Services Corps since its inception in 2008 (<http://www.ibm.com/ibm/responsibility/corporateservicecorps/>).

All our programs, irrespective of where the volunteers are drawn from, work towards supporting ABV's altruistic mission of strengthening businesses and their communities whilst also deepening people-to-people engagement between countries. Using the expert business skills of employees within corporate social responsibility programs, we have also seen the added benefit for companies in building the cultural literacy of their own workforce to more effectively operate in culturally diverse markets.

In view of ABV's experience, the following two questions are addressed collectively below:

- What opportunities are there to deepen our engagement across the board, including through people-to-people, economic and political/strategic links?
- How can we support stronger social and cultural links with these countries, for example through networks of Australians living in these countries or through communities in Australia?

DISCUSSION

As recognised in the *Indonesia Issues Paper*, Australia's aid program creates closer personal ties between Australia and the communities within which Australians work, the AVID Program being a critical element of this. A recent AusAID survey of returned volunteers indicated that 97 per cent of volunteers increased their understanding of other cultures after developing good relationships with their in-country colleagues¹. ABV plays a role in this work and over two thirds of our volunteers continue to provide ongoing support to the organisation when they return to Australia. This is often in the form of a mentoring role.

¹ 2012 Survey of Returned Volunteers, Orima Research, October 2012.

Further, given our particular niche of supporting businesses, we support the economic development of communities through the specific transfer of strategic planning, financial management, accounting, IT, human resources and marketing skills.

It is not only governments however, which recognise the importance of, and support, volunteering. Our conversations with corporates globally, and increasingly within Australia, demonstrate a recognition of a stronger role they can play through corporate volunteering and are reaping the benefits.

Obvious business benefits of a one month corporate volunteer program include the enhanced reputation of the company and leadership development. More subtly however, is the experience acquired by working with people in different cultural settings and often with limited resources. It challenges participants to examine assumptions and preconceived ideas of doing business, and to think creatively in developing solutions, working with a team of individuals who each bring unique perspectives to the table. This is mutually beneficial to the participants and ultimately the business, as well as the in-country partners with which they work.

As Australian businesses increasingly look to work in global markets, particularly in Asia, a corporate volunteering program is a unique way to understand how to do business in other markets. IBM employees testify that participation in their Corporate Services Corps Program has enhanced their leadership, consulting and training skills to facilitate international partnerships and, most importantly, their cultural intelligence.

From a corporate social responsibility perspective, businesses are recognising that they need to support the communities within which they work. Hence, whilst also driven by long-term business imperatives, there is also a moral obligation to do so. From ABV's perspective, the local organisations we partner with in country benefit through skills improvement and overall increased staff performance and morale; new or improved practices, behaviours, standards and products; and exposure to outside experience and knowledge.

Case Study

ABV In-Country Partner: Yayasan Konservasi Laut Indonesia (Marine Conservation Foundation Indonesia)

Location: Makassar, Indonesia

Project: Project Management and Business Planning

Yayasan Konservasi Laut (YKL) Indonesia or The Foundation for Marine Conservation Indonesia is a non government organisation (NGO) that focuses on issues related to coastal areas and small islands.

YKL Indonesia has three areas of focus:

- conservation of coastal ecosystems, marine and small islands;
- empowerment of coastal communities; and
- application of eco-friendly alternative technologies with the aim of increasing income generation for communities.

YKL Indonesia conducts various programs in cooperation with other stakeholders such as local and central government and international NGOs. The programs are largely aimed at local economic

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empowerment, consistency enforcement, institutional strengthening at the local level, increasing awareness of environmental protection in the coastal regions, oceans and small islands, as well as cohesion within the management approach.

YKL Indonesia faced a number of challenges including:

- weak project management and lack of effective organisation and collaboration with the communities; and
- limited knowledge and skills in business planning within the organisation and the community groups with which they work.

Project Goal

The goal of the project was to improve the knowledge and skills of YKL Indonesia staff and community groups in project management and business planning.

Outcomes

As a result of skills and knowledge transfer between the business volunteers, YKL staff and community groups, YKL Indonesia was able to integrate project management skills into organisational work practices. Further, staff developed the skills to independently and confidently design and implement a business plan that has assisted them to take the organisation to the next stage of development.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Corporate volunteering programs (which can be developed through various team and customised models) provide opportunities for deeper engagement through people-to-people links, thereby developing strong social and cultural links. Businesses are increasingly finding that corporate volunteering also provides enhanced economic links.

Government departments, particularly those with a presence in Asia such as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Australian Federal Police should also consider the potential opportunities and political and strategic benefits that such a program would bring.

“It’s not just philanthropy, it’s leadership development and business development, and it helps build economic development in the emerging world.”

Stanley Litow, IBM Vice President, Corporate Citizenship and Corporate Affairs.