



Improving the contribution of foreign voluntourists in South Africa: The importance of training and supervision

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Dates:

Received: 08 July 2019

Accepted: 07 Nov. 2019

Published: 12 Feb. 2020

How to cite this article:

Strohmeier, C. & Heleta, S., 2020, 'Improving the contribution of foreign voluntourists in South Africa: The importance of training and supervision', *The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa* 16(1), a730. <https://doi.org/10.4102/td.v16i1.730>

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The market for voluntourism from the Western world to developing countries is on the rise. Voluntourists are mainly young people who combine travel with volunteering in educational, early childhood development, environmental or other projects. Hence, it is of outmost importance to assess and analyse the contribution of voluntourists to the projects, and especially to the development and progress of the children they work with. This research assesses the skills, experiences and contributions of foreign voluntourists to the development of vulnerable children in South Africa. To get a better understanding of what voluntourists contribute to their projects and the children they work with, researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with people who work with voluntourists, as well as with voluntourists themselves in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. One of the main findings of this research is that training and supervision of voluntourists is crucial if the impact of the voluntourists is to be improved.

Keywords: volunteer; voluntourist; children; development; NGOs; schools; South Africa.

Introduction

The increasing number of volunteer and voluntourism opportunities gives young people from all over the world, and particularly from the Global North, the possibility to travel and gain experience abroad (Slowe 2011). The increasing interest in voluntourism has been noted since the early 1990s, and the number of young people going abroad after finishing high school or university (or even during their studies) is continuously on the rise. One of the main reasons why young volunteers and voluntourists from the developed world go abroad is 'to make a difference' in the Global South (Hartman, Paris & Blache-Cohen 2014) or to achieve fulfilment for themselves (Wilson & Musick 1999).

While volunteering is about offering one's experience and knowledge to other people or communities in order to help them (Beigbeder 1991), voluntourism connects a holiday trip with a chance to participate in a social or charity project in the travel destination (Alexander 2012; Guttentag 2009; Luh Sin, Oakes & Mostafanezhad 2015; Raymond & Hall 2008; Simpson 2004; Wearing & McGehee 2013; Young 2008). McGehee (2014) added that while volunteering is primarily about self-development and altruism, voluntourism gives equal weight to both volunteering, on the one hand, and travel and tourism, on the other hand. The most common volunteer and voluntourist projects deal with community work, environmental projects, work with children or charity programmes (Guttentag 2009; Luh Sin et al. 2015).

The term voluntourism is still not widespread. According to Mostafanezhad (2014), people who are aware of the term voluntourist do not associate it necessarily with something positive. During Mostafanezhad's study, it emerged that people were more willing to book a volunteering experience on a homepage that advertises 'volunteering opportunities' instead of 'voluntourist opportunities'. Therefore, many organisations continue to advertise volunteer experiences, even though they are offering voluntourism opportunities (Mostafanezhad 2014).

In this article, the terms volunteer and voluntourist are used when discussing the volunteering practices in general. However, the term voluntourist is used when discussing South Africa, in particular, as well as the data and findings presented in the second part of the article. This is performed primarily because of the fact that most foreign volunteers are interested in South Africa, due to it being an attractive travel and tourist destination (Govender & Rogerson 2010). While there are many young people whose volunteering engagement is driven by altruism and

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wanting to assist the less fortunate, they often combine this with travel, sightseeing and exploring South Africa and the surrounding region.

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the fastest growing voluntourist destinations for young people from the Global North. Voluntourists in Africa have various project opportunities, and the continent offers one of the biggest selections of programmes globally. South Africa, in particular, is not only one of the favourite destinations in Africa but also one of the top global destinations for voluntourists (Hartman et al. 2014). Opportunities for voluntourism in South Africa most commonly involve wildlife or forest conservation, education, and the possibility to work in orphanages and on health-related projects (Rogerson & Slater 2014). Young volunteers and voluntourists can also be part of the education system in South Africa, by helping pupils with their homework, teaching them foreign languages or computer skills (Go Overseas 2016; Projects Abroad 2016).

Many non-profit organisations (non-governmental organisations [NGOs]) focus their projects specifically on the education of children in developing countries because children represent their future and hope for development and progress. This was also supported by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aimed to achieve universal primary education for children all over the world (Kumar, Kumar & Vivekadhish 2016). Basic education is also a key part of the sustainable development goals (United Nations 2015). Furthermore, because of extreme inequality and a high rate of severe diseases, organisations are also faced with the task of caring for orphans or children who would otherwise be without caregivers (Banks & Hulme 2012). As there are many projects involving children in low-income countries, foreign voluntourists frequently get involved in tutoring, and working in orphanages, primary education or day-care centres (Go Overseas 2016; Projects Abroad 2016).

As most voluntourists are from different cultures and very different social backgrounds, it is often difficult for them to work and interact in an appropriate manner with people from the host community. This is because of a lack of essential knowledge about the country, cultures, traditions, challenges and needs. In addition, many voluntourists are not trained in the fields that they end up working in. However, some organisations from the Global North that offer voluntourist experiences in South Africa advertise on their homepages that there is no need for any skills or experience in order to participate as a teaching volunteer (Projects Abroad 2016; Slowe 2011). 'Whatever your age, ability, or level of experience, you are welcome to join a volunteer Care Project in South Africa'; this is just one ad promoting voluntourism opportunities in South Africa, which does not require any specific experience (Projects Abroad 2016). While teaching children and young adults is normally something that needs to be studied before it is practised, it seems that this often does not apply to Western voluntourists who work in many parts of the Global South. This is highly problematic as vulnerable children and young adults may suffer from lack

of support and care by people who are not experienced enough to provide these in a professional and correct manner.

Vulnerable children in developing countries, and especially children in orphanages, are often traumatised by what they have experienced in an early stage of life, and they need qualified people to work with them and support them. There is very little research available on the impact voluntourists and volunteers have on the children they are working with in the developing world. In order to fully understand how the children are impacted and how they can be better supported by volunteers and voluntourists, it is important to hear the voices of the different parties involved in voluntourism. This research has engaged with voluntourists, NGO staff and managers, a principal and teachers at a local school, and a social worker in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, to better understand how the outcomes of voluntourist engagement in projects with vulnerable children can be improved through training and supervision of voluntourists.

The voluntourism market globally

Non-profit organisations around the world, and particularly local NGOs in the developing world, often invite or accept volunteers and voluntourists to assist them on projects and daily activities as they hope to get additional capacity, which they might otherwise not be able to afford. Voluntourists travel mostly from the Global North to Global South in the hope of gaining experience and contributing to local development through serving in local communities (Guttentag 2009). They are involved in community work, work with children, environmental projects, charity programmes and many other projects (Guttentag 2009; Luh Sin et al. 2015). Voluntourists are generally young people who go abroad in search of new experiences and to explore other countries and cultures, all of which is seen as a new kind of tourism combined with volunteering and charity work (Alexander 2012; Govender & Rogerson 2010; Simpson 2004).

As many young voluntourists are not only interested in the volunteering work they are doing but also in the destination they travel to (Simpson 2004; Raymond & Hall 2008), more projects for voluntourists can be found in countries with picturesque landscapes and friendly populations. This makes the interests and demands of voluntourists the primary focus of this industry, which is also manifested in the tendency of existing research to focus on the voluntourists themselves, and not on the host countries, projects or the beneficiaries of their support and work (Ouma & Dimaras 2013; Raymond & Hall 2008; Wearing & McGehee 2013). This is in spite of the fact that the projects are originally created to help people in need or to generate development, and not to serve young Western voluntourists and their interests.

Voluntourism in South Africa

The argument that voluntourists are primarily interested in attractive locations can be seen in South Africa. Cape Town is

not only one of the most popular cities for tourists but also hosts more voluntourist projects than any other South African city (Govender & Rogerson 2010). Other cities of similar size have comparably as many needs for volunteers, but they rarely appear as locations for voluntourism opportunities on homepages targeting voluntourists from the Global North. A study by Benson and Seibert (2009) about voluntourists from Germany showed that 78% of the voluntourists spent their time in and around Cape Town, while 11% were placed in Port Elizabeth and only 5% volunteered in projects in or around Durban. This is the case even though the Western Cape province, where Cape Town is located, performs better when it comes to employment or provision of education and health care than other parts of South Africa. In addition, while many people in need live in rural areas, most foreign volunteers tend to go to the urban centres (Benson & Seibert 2009). As big cities offer more tourist attractions and places for socialising, this might be the reason why voluntourists prefer being in or close to these places, as a significant part of their motivation is tourism, travel and sightseeing in the host country.

At the same time, volunteers and voluntourists are playing an important role in community development, and educational and charity projects in South Africa. According to the research by Benson and Seibert (2009), 41% of the participants in their study worked on education projects, and a further 30% worked in projects related to social services, which include orphanages or work with people with disabilities. Many of the organisations that host them require volunteers, as they lack the capacity to provide services with their limited staff. However, there is almost no research on the impact these young voluntourists have on children and other vulnerable groups they work with, even though this should be the main focus as these are the beneficiaries of the projects and assistance.

Criticism of voluntourism

Even though volunteering and voluntourism are popular and in high demand, and young people benefit or learn by being part of the experience, there is serious criticism in the literature on this topic. Voluntourists are often involved with vulnerable and less fortunate communities and individuals. Their main goal – and that of the organisations that recruit them – should be to achieve positive change and to facilitate community development that helps vulnerable people. Nevertheless, this is not always the case in developmental projects and in the work of the voluntourists. A positive outcome for volunteers and voluntourists travelling to foreign countries and cultures is that they have an opportunity to get to know other cultures and to understand other ways of living and interaction. Hartman et al. (2014) suggested that this can possibly support a more peaceful world and solidarity. This is influenced by an increasing international understanding and tolerance for and between different cultures (Raymond & Hall 2008). However, Guttentag (2009) argued that volunteers, rather than the local communities, benefit in the form of personal growth and increased intercultural understanding.

Foreign voluntourists travel to the host country with an aspiration to make a difference. They often think that their opinions and values are the ones that count, and they want their host community to 'benefit' from them. Divergent thoughts and ideas of local NGO workers or people in the host community are often seen as less important and sometimes even ignored by the foreign volunteers and voluntourists (Guttentag 2009). Many try to force their ideas onto their host community even when they know very little about the host society or local people's needs and interests (Guttentag 2011; Simpson 2004). Thus, many projects facing these challenges might not achieve their developmental goals because foreign volunteers and voluntourists have a negative impact on the projects.

It is important for the host communities to ensure that they preserve their own culture, language and the way of being; it is also crucial that the projects that aim to assist them focus on what the communities need the most. The commonly promoted assumption about voluntourists 'making a difference' should mean that they have the required and necessary knowledge, expertise and capacity to create positive social change (McGloin & Georgeou 2016). This is questionable when it comes to young voluntourists from the Global North, because for most short-term volunteer placements, skills, experience or knowledge about the local history, current affairs, culture and language are not required. For some researchers, this brings into question the contribution that can be made by voluntourism and the assumption that young foreign volunteers and voluntourists can make a difference in their host communities and organisations (Raymond & Hall 2008; Simpson 2004). Guttentag (2009) went further and stated that voluntourists and volunteers can inhibit progress in communities where they work. A manager of an NGO who was interviewed during Guttentag's research conducted in Kenya confirmed this and said that, in spite of all the challenges, they continue to work with voluntourists mainly because they help generate awareness for their organisation and projects. However, it is questionable if the awareness alone might help, while the original work that needs to be performed with vulnerable populations is hindered by the voluntourists.

As volunteering and voluntourism in the Global South are seen to be an open and popular market, more people desire to participate in the projects and more private companies look to sell the experiences (Sharp & Dear 2013). Increasing commercialisation is jeopardising vulnerable communities and their environment (Raymond & Hall 2008). Companies and organisations in the Global North that are selling voluntourism to young people are in most cases not directly engaged with local communities in the developing world and their needs. They are often not interested in local community desires because their interests are to expand their business and increase profits; most importantly, money comes from the voluntourists, and not from the affected communities abroad (Wearing & McGehee 2013). This is different from the focus and the aims of most local NGOs, which are usually established to contribute to community

development and to support local communities in countries such as South Africa. Nevertheless, the NGOs are also in need of voluntourists to achieve their goals, as they often lack capacity or have inadequate funds to employ enough workers (Wearing & McGehee 2013). While many voluntourism-promoting organisations in the Global North are primarily focussing on the interests of their paying customers over the needs of the host communities (Foller-Carroll & Charlebois 2016; Wearing & McGehee 2013), it is even suggested that for-profit organisations that promote voluntourism should be stopped from sending voluntourists to developing countries because they are not at all interested in assisting vulnerable communities (MoSVY 2011).

Research methodology

This was a qualitative study conducted in 2017 and 2018. The data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews, as they provide an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon which has not been studied in-depth yet, at least in South Africa. All interviews were conducted with a prepared interview guide, which consisted of open-ended questions. The interview guides differed between each group to ensure that the questions were adapted to the specific role of the participant in the conducted research. The main aim of the research was to analyse the contribution of foreign voluntourists to the development of young children in South Africa. This article reports on the findings of a larger research project, which looked more widely at voluntourism and development in South Africa. Given its focus on voluntourism and work with children specifically, this article draws on part of the broader interview data to look at the training and supervision needed to improve the contribution of foreign volunteers and voluntourists.

Potential ethical issues were considered during all the steps of the research process. Before the data collection, ethical clearance was obtained. All interviews were based on informed consent. Every participant was told about the aim and objectives of the study and ensured that no harm will befall the participants. All participants were entitled to withdraw from the study at any stage if they wished to do so. To protect anonymity and confidentiality, participants' names are not revealed in any publications or presentations (Bryman & Bell 2011; Matthews & Ross 2010).

Research findings

This section will discuss the findings that emerged from semi-structured interviews with 10 voluntourists, four managers of local NGOs, two teachers, a school principal and a social worker (see Table 1 for participant details). Five of the 10 interviewed voluntourists came to South Africa without any previous experience of working with children, NGOs or vulnerable communities (Voluntourists 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9). Only three voluntourists had a job in their home country that was related to their volunteering work in Port Elizabeth (Voluntourists 4, 5 and 10).

Representatives of three organisations said that they have an introductory session for the voluntourists, or at least give them some information before or when they arrive (Manager A, B and D). One organisation, for example, gave voluntourists a township¹ tour and told them about the history, culture and the issues and challenges facing people in the townships in the Port Elizabeth area (Manager A). Only one organisation had a training day when new voluntourists arrived (Manager D). Five voluntourists did not consider the lack of training upon arrival as an issue, as they felt that training was not necessary owing to the easy nature of the job (Voluntourists 1, 2, 6, 8 and 9).

On the other hand, two voluntourists who worked at a school wished that they received more information about their job at the time they started with the work (Voluntourists 5 and 7). They said that nobody told them what to do with the children – neither when the teacher was around nor when they had to take care of the class by themselves. One voluntourist, who studied to be a social worker, also wished to have been better prepared for the work and the setting in order to know how to handle certain situations more appropriately and with respect for local circumstances and culture (Voluntourist 10). Only two voluntourists mentioned that they had somebody with experience who supported them while doing their volunteer job (Voluntourists 3 and 7).

A number of voluntourists mentioned lack of communication and instructions as one of the main issues during their stay (Voluntourists 5, 7 and 10). In contrast, an issue highlighted the most by staff members and managers was that voluntourists were too selective about the jobs and duties they wanted to do (Manager C; Principal; Teachers 1 and 2). While five voluntourists said that they felt appreciated most of the time, they also said that they did not feel appreciated by some people or at certain times while working on their projects (Voluntourists 1, 2, 4, 7 and 8). Voluntourist 1, for example, said that she spent her first day at a crèche in a township feeling unappreciated and even had the feeling that they did not want her there. The following day, she asked her sending organisation whether she could change her project. Her feeling was based on the fact that the local staff only spoke in the local language, isiXhosa, which led her to assume that they were not interested in her at all. She was moved to another project the next day.

Two voluntourists at a primary school were asked to teach a class for a week when one of the teachers got sick. Even then, neither of the two received any instructions about what they should or should not do with the children; they were sent into the classroom and left alone with the children when they came to the school on a Monday morning (Voluntourists 5 and 7). When the less experienced voluntourist was asked

1.A 'township' in the South African context generally refers to a low-income area, often on the periphery of a town or city. According to Domingo (2011:1940–1942), the apartheid system enforced separate residential areas, with the aim to segregate different racial groups politically, economically and culturally. Poorly developed and serviced townships were reserved for black people as a way to restrict and dehumanise black South Africans. The post-1994 transition has largely failed to meaningfully transform the apartheid residential and spatial planning and segregation, with the 'morphology of the post-apartheid city ... not all that different from what it was during apartheid' (Domingo 2011:1953).

TABLE 1: Interview details.

Participant	Date of interview	Topic of discussion	Place of interview
Manager A	03 August 2017	Organisation and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Manager B	21 August 2017	Organisation and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Manager C	07 August 2017	Organisation and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Manager D	04 August 2017	Organisation and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Principal	07 August 2017	The project and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Social worker	13 September 2017	Voluntourism and the study findings	Port Elizabeth
Teacher 1	17 August 2017	The project and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Teacher 2	18 August 2017	The project and experiences with voluntourists	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 1	03 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 2	03 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 3	03 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 4	03 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 5	10 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 6	10 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 7	10 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 8	10 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 9	10 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth
Voluntourist 10	07 August 2017	Experiences as a voluntourist	Port Elizabeth

how he felt when they sent him into the classroom to teach, he said:

'I could not be a teacher ... I could not be the teacher for the classroom ... I think I can keep them quiet, for example, but it is not my best skill.' (Voluntourist 7, pers. comm., 10 August 2017)

Voluntourist 7 went on to add that he is not used to teaching and taking care of so many children. The other voluntourist, who studied to be a teacher in her own country, said she knew how to handle the children and how to teach them for a whole week (Voluntourist 5). While the less experienced voluntourist was not feeling confident most of the time, the more experienced voluntourist said that the opportunity to teach children when their teacher was absent was great for her (Voluntourist 5). She added that it was interesting and valuable to get an opportunity to teach in another country. Although she is used to teaching, she pointed out that it was unprofessional that she did not get any instruction from the people working there and that she had to be creative to come up with things to do with the children without any guidelines or advice (Voluntourist 5). As this voluntourist had already worked as a teacher in her home country, she was able to come up with a plan to teach the children. If she did not have the teaching knowledge and experience, the kids would have lost a whole week of effective teaching or may have been taught in an incorrect way.

Even though she was working in another country and culture, and was teaching in a foreign language, this particular voluntourist felt confident throughout the whole week of teaching. She mentioned that the other less experienced voluntourist would have struggled with the work without her and that she thinks that most voluntourists would not be able to cope with working with children in the classroom alone for a week of teaching. In addition, she also stated that the school knew about her teaching background and she is convinced that they would not have given her the responsibility of teaching and taking care of children without her teaching background. When asked if she thought other

voluntourists without educational background could have performed the same job, she seemed offended and said:

'No. Not everybody can do it. My background helps me a lot ... for my colleague, I think it is more difficult for him ... because he has no background. I had four years of school to be a teacher.' (Voluntourist 5, pers. comm., 10 August 2017).

Voluntourist 10, who studied to be a social worker, said that she was sometimes unsure as to how to handle certain situations. She said that from her educational background, she knew that it was important to keep a distance from the children and not hug them and cuddle them all the time, as this would make them attached to the people who would be leaving in a few weeks. Nevertheless, she had situations where the children ran towards her calling her 'mama', and she did not know how best to handle these situations. However, the social worker, with whom all the interview data were discussed at the end of the data collection phase, mentioned that the word 'mama' in Xhosa culture does not have the same meaning as the terms 'mom' or 'mother' elsewhere. Many kids in South Africa use this term as a sign of respect, and they would call any older person 'mama'. She said that the voluntourists often think that the vulnerable kids they work with see them as a substitute for their parents, which is not the case in most situations. Nevertheless, the voluntourist had never heard about this and added that she wished that somebody had prepared her for these situations, so that she would have known how to react and how to deal with them better. Even though she was used to working with vulnerable children back home, and she was experienced in dealing with difficult situations, she was not prepared enough for many things that happened during her time in Port Elizabeth (Voluntourist 10).

The local social worker who was interviewed for this research said that most NGOs and projects that host voluntourists do not have an orientation or preparation phase for new voluntourists, or supervision during their stay:

'I would say the organisations are either too busy, or they don't realise how important orientation and preparation are and how

lost the volunteers are without them.' (Social worker, pers. comm., 13 September 2017)

According to the social worker voluntourists are often overwhelmed with the work they do, as they are not used to that kind of work and are not typically trained to do it. In addition, they also do not know how to handle certain challenges and problems that come up with the children or even the other staff members. She criticised organisations that do not instruct their voluntourists, and even called it 'unethical', as it can cause serious problems not only for the children they are working with but also for the voluntourists themselves. She also mentioned that most local organisations want to have volunteers or voluntourists because they lack staff, but they often do not know how to take advantage of the additional workforce that is given to them or to assist the volunteers to do well in their roles.

Ethical consideration

This article followed all ethical standards for a research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Discussion

In many local projects and organisations in South Africa, foreign volunteers and voluntourists are welcome, particularly because of the staff shortages. As most of the foreign volunteers are young people who lack experience and knowledge to work with children, they require training and assistance to perform well in their important roles. However, when they arrive, volunteers and voluntourists are not given enough, and in some cases, any orientation, preparation, training or supervision for working with vulnerable children. It is highly irresponsible, unprofessional and unethical for the organisations that promote volunteering experiences in the Global North to tell young people that they can work with children, in orphanages and schools in the Global South, without any previous experience. It is equally irresponsible and unethical for schools and organisations in the Global South to allow these same volunteers to work with children without orientation, training and supervision.

The findings in this research suggest that appropriate preparation of voluntourists before or upon arrival, as well as training and supervision throughout their stay in countries such as South Africa, should be a vital part of every project that hosts voluntourists and volunteers from the Global North. Birdwell (2011) argued that proper training and information about host country's historical background, local cultures, current realities and challenges, and preparation for what to expect during the volunteering experience are essential for every foreign volunteer and voluntourist working for an NGO or a project in the developing world. This would ensure better experience for the volunteers and voluntourists and better service delivery at the projects. Only three of the 10 voluntourists who were part of this research received a short instruction about what they should expect

and do while working on the projects in South Africa. The others did not get any kind of training before they started working on their projects. Voluntourists and volunteers who are involved in work with children, such as teaching, must receive proper instruction and orientation before they start with their duties.

While Birdwell (2011) wrote about the importance of training for volunteers and giving them necessary instructions and supervision during their time with the NGOs and projects, only two of the organisations studied provided their voluntourists with some kind of training or with a supervisor who provided guidance and advice. This is particularly important because most of the interviewed voluntourists were young and not experienced in the field they were volunteering in. Hence, it is questionable whether they should have been allowed to interact with children without proper preparation, training and supervision. Hartman et al. (2014) stated that the preparation of the volunteers and even their host communities is vital for successful integration and utilisation of volunteers from abroad. However, this has not happened in most of the studied NGOs and projects.

A few voluntourists mentioned the lack of communication and instruction as a problem that came up during their time in Port Elizabeth. While one voluntourist did not feel appreciated at her project site and asked to be assigned to another project, some voluntourists felt uncomfortable in certain situations. Even though the main aim of the projects and local NGOs was not the satisfaction of the voluntourists, they should still try to make their stay worthwhile and use their presence in the best way possible. Some difficulties and discomfort might arise because of the challenges such as speaking different languages and a lack of mutual understanding when it comes to cultural differences. One voluntourist mentioned that the staff members were only speaking isiXhosa and did not communicate with her, which might not be because of disrespect but possibly because of a language barrier. We must also remember that the staff members at schools and NGO projects are often faced with frequently changing volunteers. It is not difficult to imagine that it might be tiring for the staff and teachers to engage with and instruct new voluntourists every few weeks while also trying to complete their daily work. Nevertheless, it would be helpful to engage with young voluntourists from abroad before they start working at their projects, train them about cultural differences and language barriers, and prepare them for possible issues that could come up during their stay. This would help them make the most out of their experience while at the same time improving the contribution to their projects.

The social worker who was interviewed for this research has developed an orientation programme for foreign volunteers she works with at her university, which aims to help them balance the expectations with the reality they are likely to experience. Student volunteers often have expectations about what the volunteering would be like;

as they often come from Europe or the United States, they are used to a very structured way of working, which is not always the case in the projects they are volunteering at. During their orientation, they learn about South Africa, its history and demographics, and they discuss issues related to poverty and inequality in the country. They also critically discuss volunteering and the problems that could come up throughout their time as volunteers, which is supposed to get them prepared for what they might have to deal with. In addition, the social worker has monthly workshops with volunteers where they talk about their experiences, challenges and problems at the projects. The social worker also acts as a neutral facilitator between the NGOs, local schools and projects, on the one hand, and foreign volunteers, on the other hand. Sometimes, volunteers are uncomfortable to talk about their challenges with the people at the projects, but it is easier for them to open up in a classroom with other volunteers and a neutral facilitator (Social worker, pers. comm., 13 September 2017). The social worker's and arguments about preparation and supervision for volunteers relate to Birdwell's (2011) suggestions mentioned above. Arguably, prepared and supervised volunteers are likely to have a better impact than those that are not prepared, oriented and continuously supervised.

The reality in South Africa is that most local NGOs and projects lack capacity to run their basic operations. Similarly, many public schools where foreign volunteers work are dysfunctional, lack resources or are in a state of crisis. Many organisations and schools would be unable to provide structured orientation, training and supervision to foreign volunteers and voluntourists. This is where the National Department of Basic Education and the Department of Social Development, together with their provincial counterparts, can play a role and provide assistance in the form of training and workshops for NGO and school staff, and even foreign volunteers. This needs to be performed to protect the well-being of the vulnerable children with whom foreign volunteers work. Similarly, South African public universities can provide support to the organisations and schools in the cities and areas where they are based, similar to what the interviewed social worker provides to foreign student volunteers at her university. The universities can develop online courses that are required to be completed before foreign volunteers and voluntourists can start with their work at local projects.

A key limitation of this research is that it focussed only on one city in South Africa, a few NGOs and a primary school, and a small number of foreign voluntourists. However, this is an important start that shows serious challenges that must be addressed. Future research should expand to other parts of South Africa, Africa and the rest of the developing world. In addition, more host organisations, sending organisations and volunteers should be interviewed or surveyed, and different areas should be compared to find out if similar challenges and problems are faced elsewhere. Future research should also explore in more detail possible solutions that can assist

the orientation, training and supervision of foreign volunteers to provide meaningful assistance to their host organisations and the recipients of their assistance.

Conclusion

In South Africa, many foreign volunteers and voluntourists work in the education system or day-care facilities for infants and young children. However, most of them come to the country with limited or no skills to work with children. Still, they are given the opportunity to work with this vulnerable population because of the shortage of staff at organisations or schools where they volunteer. Often, volunteers and voluntourists are not given training or supervision at the projects where they work, leaving them to improvise or do as they wish. Because of an increase in the presence of volunteers and voluntourists in educational projects, orphanages and day-care centres, it is essential for the host organisations to ask about their capacity and the contribution they can make to the projects and the children they work with, as well as how this can be improved.

Keeping in mind that sustainability is one of the main issues of development in the 21st century, the real effects of a development project should always be questioned. Increasing participation of volunteers and voluntourists in development, and in educational and charity projects in the Global South, gives them significant power to influence the development of their host community, and even the host country. Health, education and safety of children are vital issues for sustainable development in any country, as the children are the future, and they can create social change and development in the coming years if they are given quality support, care and education at an early stage.

There is no blueprint approach for volunteer or voluntourist engagement with projects and NGOs in the Global South. As organisations and projects differ and face various challenges, it is important to individually figure out what each project needs and if that can be achieved with the help of foreign volunteers. However, when projects and organisations decide to work with volunteers and voluntourists, it is of utmost importance to engage critically with them from the beginning and provide them with orientation and training about the setting, the organisation, the recipients of the assistance, and the work-related information and knowledge. Volunteers also need to be supervised throughout their stay with organisations and projects in order to be able to contribute effectively and meaningfully to the well-being of the children and other vulnerable groups they work with.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally to this work.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability statement

The data collected and analysed in this study are available upon request.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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