GLOBALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL SERVICE: A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

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International voluntary service is defined by Daftary and McBride (2004: 2) as ‘long-term, intensive volunteering whereby the server engages in social, economic, or community-based activities in a country other than her home country’. Under the auspices of long established programmes such as the United States Peace Corps, the United Nations Volunteers or a range of specialised non-governmental organisations (NGOs) such schemes have long been an integral component of international development work. Such work encompasses a diverse range of servers and receivers in the fields that include poverty reduction, business development, community work, environmental preservation or cultural exchange. The tradition of long-term developmental volunteering in the ‘third world’ by people from the industrialised countries, and the growth of associated activities such as the ‘gap year’ phenomenon popular among UK school leavers, have been relatively well documented.

But international volunteering remains a relatively under-researched topic, at least compared to other aspects of international development work. At the same time, it is a rapidly changing field of human activity. Newer forms of international service such as the growth of ‘North to South’ and ‘South to South’ volunteering, shifting practices within organisations such as Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) as they seek to work more closely than before with indigenous volunteering groups in the developing world, and changing sets of transnational expectations which exist between sending and receiving groups, and between the developed and less developed worlds, are all emerging themes in the worlds of practice and research.

The paper argues that research on the changing patterns of international service is best linked to (a) the processes of economic, technological and cultural change that are usually loosely bundled together under the term ‘globalization’, and (b) current shifting ideas about the meanings and aims of ‘international development’. This paper identifies and reviews current issues on the theme of international service (or international volunteering as it is known in some contexts) based on a selected review of current international literature and elaborates a conceptual framework for future research on this topic.

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