

# 1. Introduction

VSO Nepal, like many capacity building organisations, has had an organisational development process for several years. But, and again like many of those organisations, it has regularly questioned both its approach to building effective partnerships with non-government and government organisations and the impact of its work on the lives of its targeted disadvantaged groups. The result of that questioning is this revised approach to building successful partnerships.

The approach is intended to increase the effectiveness of all VSO Nepal programmes (Governance, HIV&AIDS and Education) by ensuring that capacity building partnerships are built on solid foundations, that we've spent time making sure that potential partners are a good fit for VSO Nepal, that VSO is a good fit for them and that we've really understood the capacity building needs of partners at their particular stage or phase of development.

Importantly, the approach is not intended to create a prescription. We recognise that organisational development is not linear and that plans must be flexible enough to adjust to changing circumstances and opportunities.



At the heart of this approach is the principle of sovereignty and respect for the rights of partner organisations and the communities they serve to decide what areas of change and organisational development are most appropriate to them. That means that our approach, our starting point in working with partners, must be "what can we do to support your organisation in improving the lives of the people it exists to support and empower?"

## VSO Nepal's renewed approach "at a glance"

- Recognition of the "Phases of Development" in a Nepali context and in which areas capacity building is needed as well as the capacity needs that are indicative of each phase of development.
- Potential partner selection and mapping of their "readiness for change".
- Partner organisational development needs analysis & planning
- Partnership reviews and measuring target group impact.
- Partnership "exit" strategies

This approach also has an influence on the following VSO organisational processes

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- Volunteer profiles, placement descriptions and volunteer handover and support processes.
- Developing continuity between pre-departure training (particularly SKWID) and In Country Training (ICT).

This approach may appear to be “seamless”. However as we all know any type of change causes various reactions, discussions and questions amongst those in the organisation. We realise at VSO that this “new approach” will definitely stimulate all three. It is our belief however that listening to reactions, being involved in discussions and finding answers to questions that are involved when an organisation decides to change is healthy and necessary despite the challenges that may crop out during the transition phase.

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## 2. VSO Nepal Approach to working in Education

### Progress so far:

Based on The Barefoot Guide, VSO Nepal's "Approach to working with Organizations and Social Change" the Education programme decided to begin to develop a similar guide appropriate to our work, especially in schools. Initially, we agreed would be helpful to have following sections:

- Shared understanding
- Establishing partnerships
  - Getting to know each other (\*Links with 3.3 Readiness for Change)
  - School identification process (\*Links with 3.3 Readiness for Change)
  - Partnership agreement (\*Links with 3.4 preparing the Change)
  - School self-assessment process/ support agreement/Action Plan (\*Links with 3.4 Preparing the Change & Capacity Building Priorities)
- Progress reporting (Compulsory for all volunteers)
  - Volunteer 3 monthly plans
  - Volunteer 3 monthly reports
- Annual Reviews
  - Partnership Reviews
  - Programme Area Review
  - Information for DFID work stream 1
  - Progress against Scale/Best-Fit Statements (including DFID Inclusion Scale)

### 2.1 Shared Understanding

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At the Annual Conference in April 2008, VSO Volunteers and Education Programme Staff developed an agreed Shared Understanding:

There are three key areas that VSO volunteers feel are important to address VSO / EFA objective 1 - to increase the quality of classroom teaching and learning particularly for girls, children with disabilities and Dalit children in selected districts.

These are:

- 1) Relationships**
- 2) Learning**
- 3) Management of the learning environment**

Volunteers believe that the most successful ways of working include listening, understanding the context and highlighting good practice.

The following indicators are some examples to consider when visiting schools

### **Relationships**

**Children, Teachers and all adults involved with the school community are equal and deserve equal respect. Good relationships take time and effort to build. They are based on trust, honesty and openness.**

#### **Examples:**

- establish an equal relationship with partners
- find common ground with the teachers/head teachers/rp's/facilitators
- learn from partners, fit in with them appreciate them
- create an environment of trust
- establish opportunities for discussion between all stakeholders including children.
- involve the whole school community - parents, pta and smc
- explore seating and group arrangements to encourage communication and cooperation
- encourage teachers to treat children as individuals by:
  - using children's names
  - using eye contact

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- greeting children and smiling
  - asking questions of the whole class, groups and individuals, allowing enough time to answer
  - praising children's efforts
  - respecting children's backgrounds and encouraging them to share personal experiences
  - asking children's opinions, including what they have found enjoyable, easy or hard
- promote an environment of equal opportunities

### **Learning**

**We are all learners, whatever our age and we can all learn from each other. To facilitate learning the learners need to know what they can already do, what they want to be able to do and how they can achieve it.**

#### **Examples:**

Encourage teachers to

- find out what children already know
- relate learning to children's abilities, experiences, cultures and knowledge
- be clear about the purpose of the lesson and what children will learn
- use a range of activities to suit different abilities and learning styles
- use resources (low cost/no cost) to support children's learning
- understand the value of games, play and fun activities
- model the behaviour they want to see in children
- ask questions and listen to the answers
- know what to do when something is not working
- develop differentiation
- use praise as encouragement
- make positive comments when marking and assessing
- think of ways to check children's progress in learning understanding
- promote an environment of equal opportunities

Encourage teachers to have discussions about :

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- how children learn
- when, how and why to use resources
- how to create and use space in the classroom
- the value of using displays
- the use the local environment as a resource
- promoting partner and group learning to encourage participation and/or differentiation
- children's learning with specific reference to girls, children with disabilities Janjantis and Dalit children
- how to actively involve children in the lesson for example, by allowing thinking time, asking questions and taking turns

### **Management of the learning environment**

**Creating an appropriate learning environment is not necessarily about funding. It is essential for children to feel safe, valued and equal. This can be achieved by teachers taking responsibility for the classroom and School Management Teams taking responsibility for the whole school.**

#### **Examples:**

- create a safe physical environment.
- create an environment for good health, for example the provision of water and sanitary toilets for both girls and boys
- create a safe environment where children feel able to experiment and make mistakes
- encourage teachers to take responsibility for the learning environment such as a clean usable blackboard
- encourage teachers to display and value children's learning
- promote the creative use of local, low cost/no cost materials
- ensure resources are sustainable and replicable
- promote an environment of equal opportunities

## **2.2 Establishing Partnerships**

### **2.2.1. Getting to know each other**

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***It is important to note that the volunteer is seen as VSO in person, So whatever the volunteer does or doesn't do will be interpreted as VSO's actions. It is also true that the volunteer and partner continue to learn about each other throughout the length of the placement.***

☒ The volunteer gathers information about the placement during the first few months of arrival through:

- School visits,
- Attending meetings at DEO,
- Head teachers' meetings,
- Training sessions
- Informal meetings

In addition to the formal introduction session, it is at these times that the partners and other Nepali colleagues are introduced to the volunteers and VSO. The volunteer (wherever possible) can share the objectives of VSO, share success stories and emphasise their role in supporting Nepal's education initiatives to develop the quality of teaching and learning.

☒ When visiting and working with schools:

The volunteer gets a true picture of what really happens in schools: the why and how of it all. This may look very different to the background reading of policies and strategies and discussions at District level meetings. Information about positive aspects of development may not exist in reality.

☒ As a volunteer at work:

Both the partner and volunteer stand exposed to each other's attitudes, temperaments, values etc. So it is important to bear in mind that: (Barefoot guide page 45)

- Everyone is different
- Everyone is interesting
- Everyone is equally worthwhile
- Everyone has the will and ability to change and develop themselves.

The success of volunteering as a human resource should start and end with the firm faith in that all human beings 'think', they 'feel' and they are 'willing' and it is love for people and love for work that can help channel the above three into causing social change that to which VSO is committed.

### **Tips for Building Relationships in Government (MoE, DoE, DEO)**

#### **Your life is more interesting than your work**

It is likely that what you ate for breakfast is of much more interest than your opinion on the best way to overcome a problem or take a project forward. It can be frustrating to be asked for the umpteenth time whether you ate rice for breakfast, but talking about what you ate is

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essentially the Nepali equivalent of talking about the weather and being able to take part in this simple exchange in Nepali will bring you much respect.

Although generally it is better **not** to talk about work when you first arrive in the morning or at lunch you can sometimes take advantage of the 'what did you eat?' small talk to move on to other subjects. It can be a good idea to raise these as open questions e.g. what did you think of that presentation on 'blah' yesterday?

### **Commute with colleagues**

In my experience the most insightful information I have gained about my workplace was while travelling with colleagues. If there is a government bus to or from your work take it regularly. You may also find yourself from time to time spending many hours travelling to or from a venue in a government vehicle. This is often a social time for government staff and there can be much joking and performing by the more charismatic staff members.

This is a great opportunity to find out what your colleagues really think about their life and work and vice versa. Again open-ended questions often receive the best responses.

### **Play along with the jokes**

Nepalis like to joke and be warned you will almost certainly be the butt of some of them, but again you will gain much respect if you can take part in this tête-à-tête in Nepali even in the most limited way.

It may be worth your while to learn a Nepali joke you can tell yourself or to practise a retort to jokes you are commonly on the end of. After two years my colleagues have never tired of pointing out that my name sounds like jeri, an Indian sweet. One of the jokes I use to turn this on its head is to reply that my middle name is guliyo (sweet) because everybody knows that jeris are sweet.

### **Join in social events**

Although it is not necessary to attend every social event in your office it can go a long way to bridging the cultural divide. Picnics can be great relationship building opportunities, although be warned they are all day affairs and often include drinking and dancing.

It is well worth taking part in the dancing (and possibly the drinking if it is not in contradiction to personal values). I went to a couple of work picnics and people still talk about my dancing regardless of how bad it seemed to me.

### **Colleagues first**

VSO volunteers often lead a somewhat dual life. On one hand you are embedded inside the government and to some extent accepted as one of the staff. On the other hand you are an 'outsider', another bideshi (foreigner) technical advisor (TA). Although it can be tempting to associate with the other 'outsiders' working in or with your office, you will typically build more trust by aligning yourself with your colleagues.

On saying that you may well find that it is much easier to communicate with other 'outsiders' and they can be a very good source of information if they have been working with your office for any length of time. If you are sensitive to the impression of your colleagues you should be able to find a happy medium.

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As an example of where it can go wrong one volunteer attended a UN workshop after being invited at short notice through the VSO office. However her government colleagues were not invited and this created some short-term bad feelings that took some time to overcome. In retrospect the volunteer felt it would have been better to have asked the colleague first whether it would be appropriate/ok for her to attend.

### **Have a stock speech ready**

This is not so much a relationship-building tip as a general recommendation to save you some embarrassment. At some time you will quite likely be called upon to say a few words unexpectedly and with little or no notice. You may as well take the opportunity to share some general thoughts on your area of work and where you think things should go. Just be careful you are not contradicting your colleagues.

### **Use power cuts to your benefit**

The power cuts during winter can be infuriating (especially if you are an IT volunteer) on the other hand like travelling they are also times when staff may have free time to talk to you. In fact winter in general is not a bad time for social (and work) conversation. When it gets down to about 5C inside with no electricity for heating you will probably find most of your colleagues outside in the sun, possibly gathered around a fire made from the wood of an unused chair.

### **Watch out for social taboos**

Although Nepalis like to joke like all cultures there are some taboo subjects. As a foreigner you will generally be forgiven for breaking a taboo, however it is also possible that no-one will tell you. There is no easy way to identify these situations in advance simply pay attention to people's reactions and ask later in private if you have said anything inappropriate.

As an example I found that while my colleagues often liked to engage in gender based (and arguably sexist) jokes in general it is apparently inappropriate to assert that women from a particular region/ethnic group are attractive.

### **Find out who the important people are**

Find out as early as possible who the senior people are in the office. Everything that happens in your office (and I mean everything) is signed off by these people and it is important to pay them the appropriate respect. This is usually not hard to do and can be as simple as using 'namaskar' instead of 'namaste' and holding your hands slightly higher. If in doubt copy your colleagues.

Possibly more importantly find out who are the people that get things done and (unashamedly) make friends with them. These will not usually be the same people and in fact there are probably a few 'fixers' in your office in seemingly very junior positions that are able to make things happen. As an IT advisor I spent two months waiting for a computer that was 'on its way'. One day a 'fixer' presented me with the computer of a senior staff member who had just been transferred. There were other staffs that were also waiting, but he had won the negotiations on my behalf.

### **Be aware of the office politics**

Inevitably you will come across factions of various sorts in your office and you may find that as with the 'fixers' some staff in junior positions seems to have more power than the senior managers. I often joked that in my office there was no guarantee that the senior officer would get a cup of tea when he asked.

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A benefit of Nepali culture is that people are generally non-confrontational meaning that everyone is a 'friend' in the work place. In addition as a VSO volunteer you have the advantage of being positioned largely outside these political factions in the first place.

Nonetheless if you find yourself involved in office politics I found it helps to be very transparent in your intentions and to pay careful attention to people's responses (see listen to the silence). For example I found myself working with two staff members who were clearly on opposite sides of a political division of some kind. I was very open about what I was trying to achieve by working with each of them and when I agreed or disagreed with their ideas or decisions. This had the effect of negating any suspicion that I was aligned with one or the other faction.

### **Listen to the silence**

People will very rarely say 'No' to you, however if you pay attention to your colleagues' reaction when airing an idea or making a proposal you can often ascertain a negative response by the silence or lack of enthusiasm. At one point I proposed that as I was not busy I might try to do some work with the manager of another section. It was clear from my section manager's response, or lack thereof, that he was not happy with this and I decided not to pursue it.

## **2.2.2 School identification process**

The following is a list of suggested factors to be considered when choosing schools to work with. They are listed randomly, although some will be essential elements for successful work with schools.

- If the Resource Area has not already been selected, the starting point is to visits to schools with RPs.
- Limit the number of RP's to 2 or 3. We cannot work in all areas of a District.
- An RP who is keen to work with you and understands VSO objectives is important
- Questions must be asked about their area such as the number of Dalits, janjati, other ethnic groups and percentage of girls in school; have other volunteers from any other organisations worked in the area?
- Meet/talk with previous volunteers and volunteers in different districts and listen.
- Look at the most recent Flash data for the Resource areas you will be visiting. Always have in mind that the figures in the Flash data are only a guide. They are not to be taken as completely accurate!

After visiting schools the following points should be considered:

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- Does the school have a high proportion of children from marginalized groups?
- Is the school open for change - including HT, teachers and facilitators?
- Is the school one where some change has already begun?
- Is the school reasonably accessible?
- What is the English language ability of staff?

Other factors to consider in the selection process could be:

- Parental involvement
- Community based links
- Number of female teachers
- Whether the head teacher is a female

Share this document with RPs emphasising all the criteria you will be using to select a school. We have to be realistic in all the above areas. We are only in the District for a relatively short time.

(See also Appendix 2.2.)

### **2.3. Partnership agreement**

After choosing your schools, it is useful to write to the Headteacher outlining the expectations for working together.

For example: Suggested Letter of commitment for working in selected school:

Namaste.....

I have already visited your school and I have seen the effort that you are making to provide quality education for the children under your care.

I would like to help you with this challenge. But I need to know which areas of teaching, learning and management you would like to change or develop. I am here to help you.

I can visit your school approximately twice a month (once a week would be even better!). Would this be useful for you?

In order to make full use of this arrangement I think it would be sensible to have a commitment from both of us:

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I will commit to spending three to four hours with you on every visit. I will work with one or two teachers and I will give feedback to them at an appointed time in the day. I will also be available for you to discuss matters arising from the broader spectrum of management, as you require. I will keep a record of progress and performance.

From your side I would like you to take note of my suggestions and try to effect the changes, which we will bring up and agree upon. I will provide a notebook for our discussion points, successes and difficulties.

I would like to keep a record of our progress - written in Nepali - on your staff notice board so that all the teachers can realise the areas of school practice that we are concerned with and draw encouragement from our progress.

Please let me know your response to this commitment so that we can adjust it to our mutual concept if necessary.

I very much look forward to working with you.

(See also Appendix 2.3)

### **2.4. School self-assessment process**

**The purpose of this section is to provide a range of different tools to help volunteers work with their selected schools to evaluate where the schools are and decide what focus the support will take. This will be very much an individual school decision made between the volunteer and school based on personal preferences, expertise and school development needs.**

**Volunteers can choose from a 'menu' of different activities such as:**

- Grandfather Story – see Appendix 2.4a
- Kit Box Cards– see ppt
- Prioritisation activity – see Appendix 2.4b
- Visualisation activity – see Appendix 2.4c
- Observations forms – see Folder: Appendix 2.4d
- Teacher's self-reflection form – see Appendix 2.4e
- Discussion grids – background, guidelines, observation, school management, community – see Appendix 2.4f
- Scale/Best-Fit statements - see 4.4 below. This is a **compulsory** element

### **2.5 Support agreement/Action Plan**

- Example School Support Agreement /Note of visit – see Appendix 2.5

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- School Agreement sets out expectations of Head, Teachers/Facilitators, RPs and Vols
- Note of visits – a brief commentary on each visit and the next steps – including any tasks for in between visits. A hard copy can be left at the school and completed each visit so that HT & RP can see what work the Vol/Teacher/Facilitator is doing
- NOTE: We may wish to include examples of Action Plans drawn up with schools (which would then link in with Volunteers 3 monthly plans/reports)
- All activities used from sections 2.4 & 2.5 will feed directly into Volunteers' 3 monthly plans/reports

### **3. Progress reporting**

**All Education volunteers produce 3 monthly plans and reports which link their work in placement with the objectives for both VSON Education Programme and individual partnerships**

**3.1 Volunteer 3 monthly plans – sample see Appendix 3.1**

**3.2 Volunteer 3 monthly reports – sample see Appendix 3.2**

### **4. Annual Reviews, Monitoring and Evaluation**

#### **4.1 Partnership Reviews**

Reviews assess the achievement of partnership objectives between VSO and individual partners. Participants assess progress towards programme objectives; reflect on learning and the impact on target groups. This information is used to support planning and improve activity implementation. **4.2 Programme Area Review**

Staff, VSO experts and all partners are provided with an opportunity to review and analyse the achievement of objectives, learn from implementation, and to adapt the work of the action.

#### **4.3 VSO Nepal Education Impact Assessment**

VSO's specific Education Impact Assessment work in collaboration with DFID is seen as a leading approach within the sector. The impact assessment covers three work streams in order to provide a holistic approach to the monitoring and evaluation of VSO's Education Programmes. The VSO Nepal Education team will be responsible for the collection, analysis and dissemination of the findings from the three work streams with support from partners and all VSO experts.

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**Work Stream 1 – Scale and Significance:** focuses on the scale and significance of VSO's education work in the three target districts. Data is collected on the number of people partner organisations are working with including the specific target groups from the population.. Examples of the data collected include the total population of children school going age, numbers of schools, teachers and children in and out of school disaggregated by gender and whether a child has a level of disability.

**Work Stream 2 – Capacity Development:** focuses on the impact of VSO's capacity development work with its partners using a 'proxy indicator' of inclusion to assess various dimensions of the partner organisation; from staffing to service delivery. Progress in the area of inclusion (considered an 'advanced' area of capacity) indicates progress in other areas of capacity development is likely. Inclusion in this context means the partner is inclusive of identified target groups in the relevant areas of its work. For example, District Education Offices will aim to include female teachers in decision-making processes at relevant levels.

**Work Stream 3 – Impact on Final Beneficiaries:** focuses on participatory beneficiary feedback from out-of-reach children identified during this action and the views of their parents through focus group discussions.

### **4.4 Progress against Scale/Best-Fit Statements (including DFID Inclusion Scale – from workstream 2 above)**

#### **Scale/Best-Fit statements - see Folder: Appendix 4.4**

These scales should be used in order to provide some consistency in reporting both internally for the programme office and externally for VSO International, European Commission (EC) and DFID

After completing a needs analysis, Volunteers will make baseline judgements, (in agreement with schools where possible) as to where a school fits on a 0 to 6 scale for:

- Inclusion (Scale provided by DFID)
- Relationships (in the classroom)
- Learning – preparation/planning
- Learning – teaching & learning approaches
- The Learning Environment

These baseline tools will also help volunteers and schools identify areas for development.

Progress can then be measured, for example, six monthly, against:

- The Inclusion Scale
- A choice of another one or two other scales, depending on agreed development areas

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