

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Measures to Mitigate the Negative Impact of Voluntourism

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Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the international trend of voluntourism grows. Voluntourism, a form of tourism combined with service activities, is highly preferred by the citizens of More Economically Developed Countries as it allows people to contribute to supporting a community with activities like teaching children. Meanwhile, charities and international agencies use commercial methods of mass tourism under the guise of international volunteering in order to make profit. Charity programs that offer voluntourism turn developing countries into a huge amusement park where illusional and exciting experiences are offered in return for massive financial gain. Voluntourists from MEDCs are able to receive numerous benefits through voluntourism while they are enjoying the international travel. They are generally attracted by having deeper insights of local communities through building relations with the local people, having opportunities to enhance their professional skills, being satisfied with their own work (self-fulfillment), and exchanging cultures.

However, despite various benefits of voluntourism, it has faced an increasing criticism. As voluntourism rarely require any training and prior knowledge or skills, voluntourists unintentionally add burdens to the locals with delayed work progress and unsatisfactory results. Furthermore, voluntourism may deprive job opportunities of the locals and undermine the ability of the host community to devise self-sustaining solutions. In addition, the projects created reinforce the stereotypes of volunteers that travel to developing countries and become volunteers even without qualifications. That being said, it is not uncommon for teenagers, non-graduates, or non-specialists to play the roles of doctor, teacher or lawyers in countries that are totally unknown to them. While there are indeed benefits to voluntourism, the undeniable negative consequences must be addressed in order to fully support the vulnerable communities.

Definition of Key Terms

Voluntourism

Generally recognised as a form of alternative tourism. The word refers to one participating in volunteering work for the community, where one visited as a purpose of **tourism**. Often times, voluntourism provides experiences to the voluntourist, rather than actual support to the host community. As a volunteer tourist, one has less expectations, less expertise, and little to no training before the “trip” in comparison with a volunteer, which results in less benefits to the local community.

Volunteering

Participating in volunteer work for the community, where one is willing to give out his or her time for the common good and without any financial gain. Volunteers have more emphasis on aiding the vulnerable community, often supported by organizations to be well-trained to be fully aware of the culture, etiquette, and language.

Infrastructure building tourism

By volunteering to this type of project, one is able to work and collaborate with local builders on reconstructing or building public facilities due to natural disasters or internal conflicts. Therefore, the volunteer could also contribute by building humanitarian shelters, refugee camps, or public facilities. These can include hospitals, schools, and sanitation facilities in said developing countries.

Orphanage tourism

A form of tourism that encourages tourists to visit child care facilities or orphanages, intended to attract tourism, often considered as one of the worst forms of voluntourism. Orphanage tourism is one of the driving factors that contributes to family breakups, therefore it is crucial to understand the problem behind orphanage institutions and how the children’s human rights are violated.

Alternative tourism

A form of tourism which tourists visit and experience places or objects that are not the usual tourist attractions. Alternative tourism enables people to be connected with the locals more, rather than visiting popular monuments or buildings. Cultural tourism, nature-based tourism, and adventure tourism are the three main types of alternative tourism. These three categories can be intertwined, based on the tourist’s desires and abilities.

Demonstration effect

The term is used to describe the local community’s behavior, social-concept, and mindset that are influenced by observing the actions of others. In relation to voluntourism, this behavior affects the community as the volunteers are unintentionally being examples of desirable lifestyle by showing how they dress up, what they possess, and how they act. As children’s brain are still in developmental

stages, one's social learning skill and environmental factors play a crucial role in their future personality and behavior.

Vulnerable community

The term is used to describe the community which have little capacity to recover, or overcome from the natural or artificial hazards.

Forms of Voluntourism

Voluntourism can vary in different forms, especially in developed countries where international agencies focuses on customer's demand rather than the community's need. It is critical to identify which form causes the most problem and the root of negativity on voluntourism.

Language Learning Tourism

A form of voluntourism where one can travel abroad and learn a language with the natives as they immerse themselves in a new culture. Participants mostly live alongside with a host family.

Flexible Tourism

A flexible project that allows participants to be independent, and more freedom towards volunteering work.

Team Trips Tourism

A set team that tackles a social challenge together, this is most common for younger participants ranging from middle school to high school; university students with gap year or even senior groups of ages 60 or older.

Lower-Income Community Tourism

Contributing in a disadvantaged community, often times a host family will be responsible in hosting, while volunteers are able to teach kids at school or help out with chores within the family.

Deinstitutionalisation

The process of reforming conventional child care system by taking down institutionalized orphanages, recovering child's current family resident (according to SaveTheChildren, more than 4 out of 5 children living in institutions are not orphans), and setting up replacement services to support vulnerable families in non-institutional ways.

Background Information

Voluntourism

Through the advancement of technologies, people have access to mass amount of information from different parts of the world. Internet platforms such as social media and video channels enables people to share their own experiences, often encouraging others to have the common experiences. Moreover, online social media is widely used as a method to approach people from different cultures and age groups, raise awareness of events, and gather the international support. However, being aware of an event unintentionally leads people to be involved in it, which ultimately increases their likelihood to participate in volunteering activities. In fact, volunteer organizations stimulate peoples' willingness to volunteer through advertisements that are aimed to match their motivations. Noticing the tragic realities of others and feeling the connection, people are influenced to make decisions which they believe would positively affect the vulnerable communities. Meanwhile, people, seeking to make changes, consider voluntourism a rational choice. Overall, modern communication has encouraged people to be outside of their comfort zone. This contributed to the growth of voluntourism, which has become an international trend.

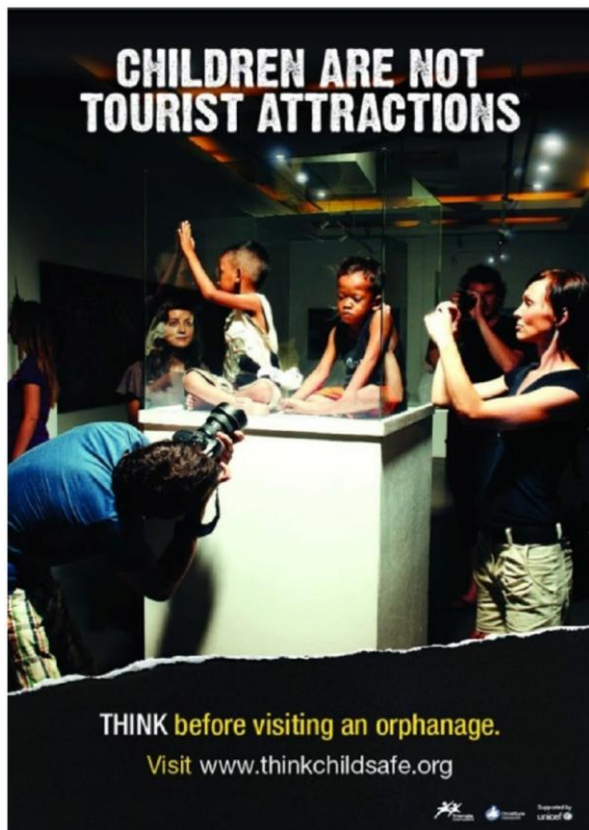
Currently, existing research focuses primarily on the positive aspects of voluntourism; however, there are still numerous negative impacts to the society that deserve increased attention from both the researchers and the project managers. According to The Travel Industry Association of America, more than 55 million Americans participated in a volunteer tourism/vacation once in their lifetime. Meaning that almost 20% of the American population have experienced voluntourism once in their lifetime. And the number is still rising like an unstoppable force. According to the director of Service Volontaire International (SVI), which is a Belgian NPO, "the most common voluntourism strategy is to identify the most attractive local disaster or crisis, the one that generates the most sympathy; and then capitalize on it to make the most out of it". An example would be the surprisingly fast project development from the company Projects Abroad. The company was already offering its volunteers reconstruction projects one week after the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015.



Volunteers help rebuild Nepal: Projects Abroad

Orphanage tourism

Orphanage tourism is a form of tourism that encourages tourists to visit child care facilities/orphanages, which is considered 'attraction'. Currently, there are over 8 million children that still lives in orphanages because of poverty and discrimination. The majority were sold to orphanage institutions due to the lack of family resource, financial income and social services. Which is also why the orphanage count in developing countries are higher than developed countries, families in poverty struggle from economic circumstances that forced them into the situation of selling their children into orphanages. In other cases, children are kidnapped by the institution and therefore uses the orphanage as a cover for human trafficking. According to the non-profit organization All Hands And Hearts - Smart Response, approximately 85 percent of 'orphans' have at least one alive parent. This happens most often in corrupted regions, areas with less social protection and security. These children are forced to attract tourists, increase international funding, and ensure the business survival. Unwilling to be apart from their family, young children easily form bonds with the tourists who leave within few weeks, days or even hours. This can become a traumatic experiences to children - as they are likely to feel that they are abandoned - negatively affecting their cognitive and emotional development. Orphans are kept looking poor, forced to learn a new talent, and malnourished in order to maximize pity the donation by visitors.



“Children are not tourist attractions, think before visiting an orphanage”: Campaign by ThinkChildSafe in partnership with Friends International and UNICEF.

Unprepared and unskilled voluntourists

As Haley A. Garrison of Western Kentucky University states, most voluntourism programs do not require to have professional skills, which results in voluntourists usually not trained nor prepared. In most cases, voluntourists are provided abundant information about “their living arrangements, tourism opportunities, and the precautions taken for their safety in a foreign country”. However, they often do not have enough information regarding the history or condition of the host community. Without knowing the culture and economic, political, environmental, and social injustices that exist, volunteers are barely playing the significant role. Moreover, lacking knowledge about the region might offend the local community as the voluntourist would have preconceived stereotypes about the locals. Foreign students and voluntourists sometimes do not have the ability to aid or apply their skills and knowledge to improve the situation of the community. For example, in a construction projects, volunteers do not have the ability to construct any facilities or houses, which might result in wasting time, energy, and resources. In worse cases, the professionals might be required to destroy most parts and reconstruct the building.

Disruption of local economies

The primary concern towards the impact on local economy is the lack of financial and vocational benefits directed towards host communities. According to a study conducted in Indonesia by Clifton and Benson (2006), one should never assume the community will inevitably benefit by hosting a volunteer tourism project. It may negatively impact local interests and labour demands, as it conflicts with the majority of work local labourers do. This also completely ignores the intention of volunteering work, which is to completely release community out of poverty.

Positive change for the local economy is one of the factors many consider when joining a volunteer tourism project, but conversely, the presence of volunteer laborers might only benefit international agencies, and encouraging such activities to be appropriate. The isolation of the project income might create miscommunication and misuse of resources as many agencies are intransparent toward its inner finance and process of operation. Moreover, the presence of volunteer workers would also promote dependency of the local community towards organizing agencies. Programs could create and perpetuate a dependency culture towards vulnerable communities. In essence, local community will be relying on the constant new arrivals of volunteer tourists, as well as the money they bring to the community.

The overwhelming reliance of local communities on voluntourism disables the government of a country's initial functions. As it diminishes the community members and government to provide local services and create solutions. A direct example of such cases is reflected by the situation in Ghana. Local citizens decided not to purchase any health insurance because they knew there would be foreign healthcare and medications every few months. This left them vulnerable between the intervention period and when the organization leaves the community.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

United Nations Volunteers is an organization that “contributes to peace and development through volunteerism worldwide”, which is a sub-organization of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). UNV calls for volunteers who are willing to be involved in “Humanitarian, peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, as well as sustainable development and poverty eradication work of the UN”. Moreover, they endeavour to gain recognition of volunteerism and its value, deliver development goals which are internationally agreed upon, and provide support for “national and home-grown solutions”.

Habitat for Humanity

Habitat for Humanity is an organization working to provide houses to vulnerable families in order to support them to have stable and independent lives. They also endeavor to ensure the family's ability to access clean water and sanitation through collaboration with governments. It is supported by their partner organizations, individual donors, volunteers, and families themselves. They have particularly focused on the Asia-Pacific region, granting shelter assistance after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2008 earthquake in China, 2015 earthquake in Nepal, 2016 Cyclone Winston in Fiji, and 2017 flood in South Asia. Overall, the organization is currently contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

ReThink Orphanages

ReThink Orphanages is an organization which contributes to prevent unnecessary child separation from their families due to orphanage tourism. Moreover, they provide alternative volunteering programs which would be more effective for tourists than orphanage tourism. They are established by Better Care Network and Save the Children UK in 2013, and their initial objective was to “understand and share information about the impact of international volunteering in residential care centres (orphanages) and raise awareness about the negative effects of volunteering in these settings”. One of their campaigns in order to raise awareness of the issues is called ‘The Love You Give’. This is a documentary film produced by ReThink Orphanages and Better Care Network which provides the story of former orphans and attempts to inform the negative influence of volunteering in orphanages

Childsafe

Childsafe is an organization that works to protect children from inappropriate environments such as homelessness, exposure to drugs, and involvement in sextrade. In addition, they also help them to have access to education, and healthcare services. They have called on citizens, donors, travelers, or anyone who “[does] not know how to react to situations of abuse of children” by creating campaigns such as Cardboard Kids campaign, believing that raising awareness and changing behavior is most important to protect children. Moreover, they offer training programs to organizations and variety of people, and provide emergency hotlines in order to respond to immediate situations where a child in a danger.

Australia

According to the Save the Children, well-intentioned Australian tourists are unconsciously contributing to the growth of orphanage tourism, which violates children's rights to belong to their families and subsequently forcing children to live in a deficient conditions. Starting with investigating the involvement of Australian money in orphanage tourism in August 2017, the Liberal-led committee has suggested the Australian government to ban orphanage tourism in 2017. Furthermore, the Australian government began examining the “introduction of a modern slavery act, which would seek to crack down

on exploitation, human trafficking and forced labor”. Followed by this, in 2018, the federal government has publicized the plans to reduce the Australian involvement in orphanage tourism aimed at schools groups and students.

Cambodia

According to the Public Radio International, there has been 75 percent increase in the number of orphanages in Cambodia, while 44 percent of orphans in those facilities have at least one parent. One of the major causes of this situation is that the orphanage tourism becoming the international trend. Similar to many other orphanages around the world, orphanages in Cambodia attracts tourists through advertising with their facilities and children, which encourages the tourists to donate and visit as short-term caregivers. Moreover, corruption contributes to the increase of the number of orphanages; orphanage tourism became one type of businesses in Cambodia, used as a source to make profits by delivering exaggerated information of the existence of child protection policy and transparent accounting.

LUMOS

An non-governmental Organization founded by J.K. Rowling. The NGO supports children worldwide to reunite with their family. With the slogan, “Children belong in families, not orphanages”, the organization has set 3 goals to complete for the next 30 years. First, they will have national plans for reform in countries with large numbers of children in orphanages by the year of 2025. Second, they will have helped 4 million children to leave institutions or prevented them for entering them in the first place, and will have trained over 100,000 professionals and specialists by the year of 2035. Last but not least, all children will grow up in loving, nurturing, and protective families by the year of 2050.

In relation to voluntourism, the organization strives to educate public awareness on the danger of participating in orphanage tourism as it could perpetuate the system and encourage the creation of more institutions. The projects created by LUMOS focuses on accountable, transformative, and inclusive training and campaigns with global access across Africa, Europe, America and Asia. Some previous attempts and strategies attempted by the organization caused strong influence to the local community, where they adapt themselves into the cultural drivers of institutionalisation through flexible models, and uses demonstration projects to alternate between orphanage replacement and community-based services. The organization played as a role model for countries’ government to replicate such solutions toward deinstitutionalization and diminishing the negative impacts of voluntourism.

Friends International/Cambodia

An international non-governmental organization focusing on children’s empowerment established in Cambodia. The Organization has been promoting the responsibilities of volunteering in areas where voluntourism are seen as popular. Friends International has been giving awareness courses to middle

school students across the European and Asian region. The goal is to discourage them from engaging in volunteer tourism, and to inform the public about the difficulties that children faced before they were moved to orphanages. As orphans will therefore be more sensitive and vulnerable to the comings and goings of tourists who reinforce their feeling of abandonment, it is crucial to avoid orphanage tourism. In Cambodia, this business has transformed orphanages into real tourist attractions. The number of institutions has tripled in the last eight years as volunteers arrive to Cambodia. In the past thirty years, the number of orphans has increased from 7,000 to 47,000, according to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). There are an estimated amount of 400 plus institutions scattered across the country, and they often receives high amount of arriving foreign aids helping out local orphanages. Over the past decade, Friends International have been promoting campaigns and worked closely with local governments and other relevant agencies to combat the situation in Cambodia.

Guatemala

Some of the most popular voluntourism events in Guatemala includes infrastructure building, where one is able to contribute in building bottle schools. In relation to building bottle schools, a multicultural organization located in the region of Latin America called “Hug It Forward”, has been dedicated to building bottle schools for Latino communities that can not afford the cost of school construction. The organization uses the project as a way steal job opportunities from the local community and benefit from the foreign labor that interferes with the local economy.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
December 7th, 1970	Foundation of United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme
January 2nd, 1975	United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) established
December 17th, 1985	December 5th, recognized as the 'International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development'
September 2nd, 1990	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) entry into force
January 15th, 1998	Resolution A/RES/52/17 proclaimed year 2001 as the 'International Volunteer

Year'

February 13th, 2013 UN adopts resolution A/RES/67/138 which includes Plan of Action

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- 56/38. Recommendations on support for volunteering, 10 January 2002, **(A/RES/56/38)**
- 58/118. Participation of volunteers, "White Helmets", in the activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian relief, rehabilitation and technical cooperation for development, 10 February 2004 **(A/RES/58/118)**
- 62/141. Rights of the child, 22 February 2008 **(A/RES/62/141)**
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 9.1, 10.2
- United Nations Volunteers, December 7th 1970 **(A/RES/26/59)**
- United Nations Volunteers Programme I, 3 January 1973 **(A/RES/29/70)**
- United Nations Volunteers Programme II, 13 December 1973 **(A/RES/31/25)**
- United Nations Volunteers Programme III, December 15th 1978 **(A/RES/33/84)**
- International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development, December 17th 1985 **(A/RES/40/212)**
- International Year of Volunteers (2001), January 15th 1998, **(A/RES/52/17)**

Possible Solutions

Organizations that manage volunteer activities should provide voluntourists with information about the culture, condition, and history about the host community and training sessions of the volunteer projects. While there are several negative consequences of voluntourism, it can be readily recognized that lacking skills and knowledge of voluntourists highly affects the community. Thus, in order to effectively tackle the issue this is a potential solution. This would allow organizations to support the community better while also supporting voluntourists with safety instructions and other information for the tourists' benefits which would still allow people to be interested in aiding the vulnerable community.

The UN should raise awareness to the general public of these practices, the consequences that the institutionalized orphanages and voluntourism activities have on the local populations. With support of organizations such as UNICEF and ReThink Orphanages, campaign advertisements which includes all information and facts about orphanage being considered as a tourist attraction and orphanage tourism actually harms children will enable to inform the people interested in volunteering orphanages and helping children. NGOs have launched programs to fight against voluntourism. For example, Friends International gives awareness courses to middle school students locally. The goal is to discourage them from engaging in tourism volunteerism. The NGO makes them understand that children in orphanages have had complicated journeys. They are therefore vulnerable to the comings and goings of tourists who reinforce their feeling of abandonment. From a long-term perspective, this goal should be a high quality yet globally accessible with internet platform as an example. Furthermore, aside from education among the negative impacts of voluntourism, the public should be aware of the clear separation and difference between a short-term volunteer project and a long-term volunteer project.

Encourage the creation of appropriate project proposals through reviews, limit to those directly from local partners and the needs of local community rather than travel agencies that does not have a clear understanding on the local community. Filtered by relative UN agencies will ensure the appropriateness of voluntourism proposals. Support from local UN agencies will ensure the identification of the major issue and to act as a direct source of potential project proposals. One of the biggest problem that leads to negative impact in voluntourism is the lack of understanding of agencies to the local community. Quality of agencies could be maintained by annual checks and further research towards the agency providing voluntourism. This solution would require massive attention from the UN and its support would also have to be well-balanced across the region with voluntourism activities. Which is something hard to maintain, which requires the ability to communicate with the locals, examine projects without bias, and funding for research as well. However, this solution does provide the ultimate and most straightforward solution to tackle voluntourism. Furthermore, a charity should spend a minimum period of time at the local community for investigation and research before proposing an actual project. A requirement for the pre-project period would be an example in addition to the policy of charities that operated voluntourism.

Ensuring the professionalism of volunteering practices, background checks of travel agencies, and project developer in relation to the local partner. Strict requirements should be set, and a higher standard should be met in order to become a registered charity that runs voluntourism projects. Written policies on responsibilities and ethics should be included as a proof of professionalism. Basic requirements such as stating a mission goal within the charity and clearly identify the intention behind the establishment of the charity. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, an investigation period should also be implemented as a requirement. Transparency of the charity should also be overwatched

by UN agencies and reviewed carefully. While private sectors may choose to work without the screening of UN agencies, there should be regulations set on the country's maximum number of charity allowed to conduct any form of volunteering work. Furthermore, eligibility of volunteers should be clarified and stated on the charity's policy in order to ensure professionalism. In other words, volunteers should have the required skills and a certificate to prove such identity. This may result in a decrease in the total number volunteers available, but quality are always greater than quantity.

Discourage the creation and development of orphanage institutions, and encourage the transformation of orphanages into service centers for local communities. In order to prevent the expansion of orphanage institutions, voluntourism would need to be stopped. Orphanage voluntourism plays a substantial role in the overall industry of voluntourism. UN agencies and organizations should take initiative and cooperate with experts from all levels, ranging from politicians to children. By working with international donors, communities, and local government; local communities would be able to redirect funds from orphanages to public health, education, and social services. An example would be Lumos, however, the organization's outreach is limited and the organization also lacks volunteers that are willing to be trained in order to participate in the "rescue" mission or orphans. A solution would be to expand the organization across different regions and develop subdivision programs so the organization will be able to train based on the background, culture and language of the region. Thus, increasing efficiency and reliability.

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