

## LETTER TO EDITOR

Dear Editor,

### **Virtual Volunteerism and its Impact on International Community Development**

The international conference on Primary Health Care in USSR (WHO and UNICEF, 1978) came out with an important Declaration to ensure equitable healthcare for people across the globe. It emphasised the need for global economic and social development in order to reduce the disparities between developing and developed countries, which would in turn guarantee equitable health for all. Developing countries have developed in-house strategies for progressive holistic growth (Nishtar et al, 2013). However, inequalities between the richer and the poorer regions of the world still exist (Hosseinpour et al, 2013).

Field volunteerism or “volun-tourism” has gained popularity over the last few years. The volunteer travels to the international destination and spends any amount of time, from a few weeks to a few months, helping a local community organisation in every possible way (Rajan, 2012). While this type of volunteerism has many advantages, the major drawback is the investment of time and money to travel across the globe.

Virtual volunteerism is gaining in popularity, especially in the development of underprivileged regions of the world. All that is required to help community based organisations located in different parts of the globe is for the volunteer to sit in front of a computer, for less than 5 hours per week. The major advantage is that there is no travel expense involved (Figure 1). In addition, the volunteer need not take time off work and hence can be involved in the project for extended periods of time. It has been seen that volunteering for overseas projects could help one to grow on the personal front and hone existing skills.

While there are many benefits to the volunteer, the recipient’s work gets done with no monetary investment by the community organisation. Secondly, the foreign knowledge and skills that are needed to develop solutions for local problems are available at the click of a mouse. The bond which develops between the organisation and the volunteer fosters a tolerance for foreign cultures, and thereby promotes world harmony.

**Figure 1: Advantages and Disadvantages of the two types of Volunteerism**



In conclusion, it can be said that virtual volunteerism involves the sharing of essential skills and knowledge between the volunteer and the community organisation/s. In a fast-paced environment that is limited by resources, this could be viewed as a powerful tool to promote international development and world peace.

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