

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS:

Understanding Rwandan OVC Volunteers in a Faith-Based Setting

ABSTRACT

Background

Catholic Relief Services (CRS)-Rwanda has been relying on volunteers to reach orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) in their communities. To improve the quality of services provided to OVC, CRS conducted a study to better understand the profile of the most committed and effective volunteers, the motivation of all volunteers, the importance of incentives, and the relationship of volunteers to the church.

Methodology

A questionnaire was completed by 256 out of 320 OVC project volunteers. Supervisors completed another questionnaire that ranked volunteers by performance. Twenty five percent of volunteers were ranked as high performers, 25% as low performers, and 50% as medium performers. Performance results were compared with the demographic data, the volunteers' involvement with the church, and their incentive preferences.

Results

Volunteer demographics were 55% female and 45% male, with 64% married, 22% single, and 13% widowed. Seventy eight percent had completed primary school, and 18% secondary school. Ninety percent were farmers. The study revealed that gender, marital status, education level and occupation had no significant effect on performance.

Ninety percent of the volunteers held leadership positions in the church where service for church work was expected and 85% were active in church more than once a week. Most volunteers (76%) were actively volunteering with children prior to the OVC program – 67% for more than five years. Eighty one percent of volunteers knew their assigned beneficiary OVC prior to the program assignment and 96% planned to continue assisting the OVC after the project has ended.

The most important incentive for the highest ranked volunteers was bicycles (35%), which at an estimated cost of \$100, was one of the most reasonably priced incentives. Thirty percent of volunteers ranked a cow as the best incentive (\$200-\$1000), 11% preferred stipends (\$30-80/month for volunteer allowance) and 9% valued training (\$150 per person for training.)

Conclusions

The study did not find any strong predictors of volunteer performance. There were no links between performance and volunteer demographics or religious and volunteer activities.

OVC projects should consider the incentives valued by the volunteers as a means to improve

OVC services. Bicycles can improve travel, training expands the volunteer's skills set, and cows are valued by the highest performing volunteers.

Faith-based organizations linking with churches for support of OVC are calling on those who have long been active in volunteer service. The study demonstrates that most volunteers have strong links to their church and were motivated to serve OVC prior to the inception of the project. External funding has allowed faith institutions to train church volunteers in new activities including child protection, VCT and anti-drug counseling and HIV prevention.

BACKGROUND

With funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR Track 1.0), CRS has been operating an Orphans and Vulnerable Children (OVC) Program in Rwanda since 2004. It is implemented by Caritas Rwanda in the dioceses of Butare and Kibungo, covering seven administrative districts and reaching 12,189 OVC and their caregivers.

The project relies heavily on the human resource contributions provided by community volunteers. Two of the greatest challenges confronting the OVC project are retention and motivation. Over the life of the OVC Track 1 project, there has been a significant decrease in the number of hours and the quality of work performed by volunteers.



A volunteer (smiling) is helping the OVC and their guardians to cultivate a pineapple field in Kibungo. Photo taken by Pontien Maniragaha, CRS Rwanda

CRS wanted to better understand volunteers -- their motivations and their relationship to the church. The aim of the study was to identify the most effective volunteers, what constitutes an effective incentive, and the costs associated with providing the most appreciated incentives to the best performing volunteers. The goal was to better understand what key variables promoted effective and sustainable volunteer activity.

METHODOLOGY

CRS-Rwanda administered two questionnaires: one to volunteers and one to their supervisors. Eighty percent—or 256 out of 320 OVC project volunteers—were sampled. OVC project volunteers were asked about their demographics, their involvement in the church, their relationship to the OVC, volunteer activities, and their valued incentives. Cost analysis was applied to the ranked incentives.

Supervisors were asked to rank the volunteers by their performance. One factor they considered was the relationship between the volunteers and the children, i.e. to which degree the volunteers knew the children, were known by them, and showed a desire to help them. A

second factor was the volunteer's relationship to the project: attendance at monthly meetings and training sessions, consistent and timely reporting of activities, and connectedness with volunteer colleagues. Finally, the volunteer's willingness to create an action plan and advocate for the children they were following was also evaluated.

The performance results were compared with the demographic data, the volunteers' involvement with the church, and their incentive preferences.

FINDINGS

Demographics

The demographic results were compiled in order to gain a better understanding of the profile of volunteers for the OVC project. The study showed that 55% of the volunteers were female, and 45% male. Gender was not a significant factor in performance ranking of the volunteers. However, men did have both the highest and the lowest performance scores. Volunteers had low levels of academic attainment: 78% completed primary school and 18% secondary school. Only 4% had completed post-secondary education (Figure 1). Marital status varies with 64% of volunteers married, 22% single and 13% divorced (Figure 2). Married volunteers were slightly

FIGURE 1. Education

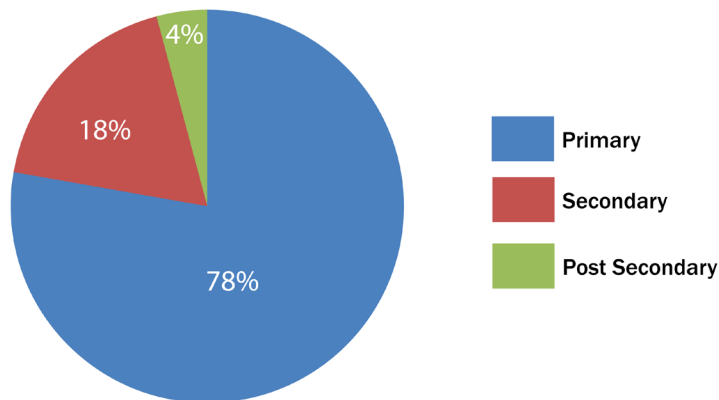
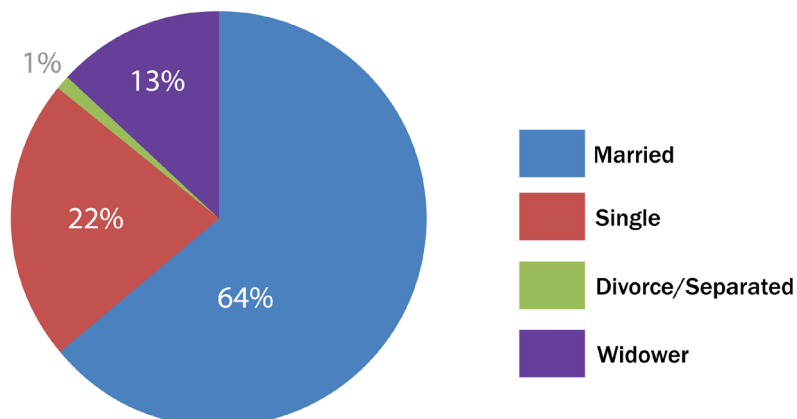
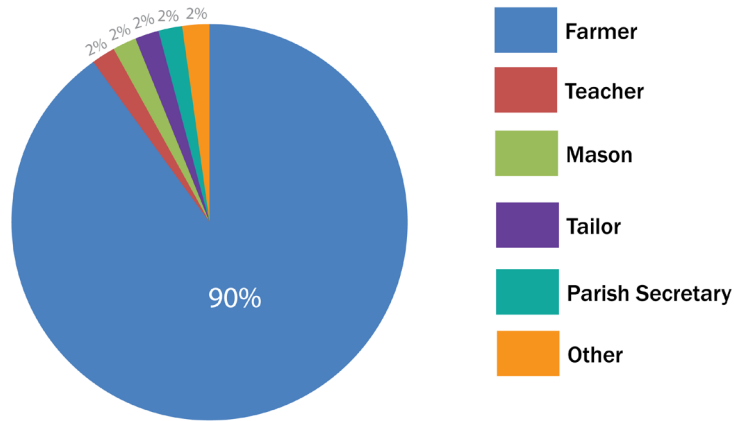


FIGURE 2. Marital Status



more likely to have higher performance ratings (73%), than the overall performance rating (64%). However, this was not significant. Finally, the volunteer profile was overwhelmingly dominated by farmers (90%), with only 10% of volunteers involved in other trades such as tailoring (2%), masonry (2%), teacher (2%), parish secretary (2%), and other (2%) (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3. Occupation



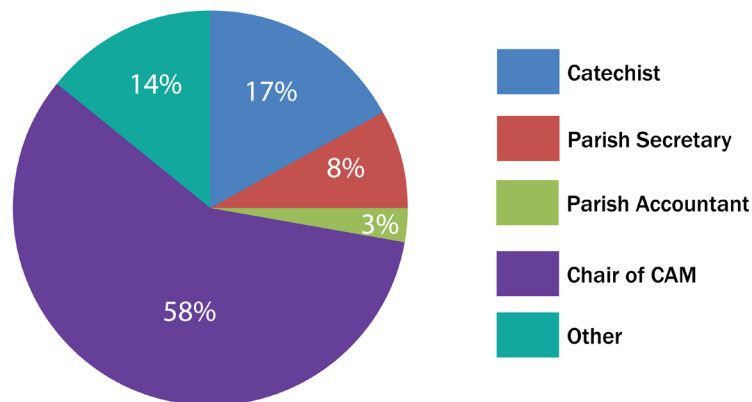
Volunteer Performance

The results of the volunteer questionnaires were analyzed with the results of the supervisor questionnaires. The volunteers were labeled by performance and categorized as either high, average, or low performers. The ranking ranged from 5 to 37, with a mean ranking of 26.9. Sixty-four volunteers were ranked in the highest percentile with a score greater than 75%; 128 were in the medium percentile of 25%-75%; and 64 were ranked as low performers with a score less than 25%.

Church Involvement

Volunteers were highly active in their churches. Ninety-five percent of volunteers were regular church attendees (12% daily, 55% more than twice a week, and 28% weekly). In addition to regular attendance, volunteers were also active in church life and activities: 58% were chairs of the Catholic Action Movement, 17% were catechists, 14% “otherwise involved”, and 11% parish secretaries or accountants (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. Post Held in Church



Volunteer History

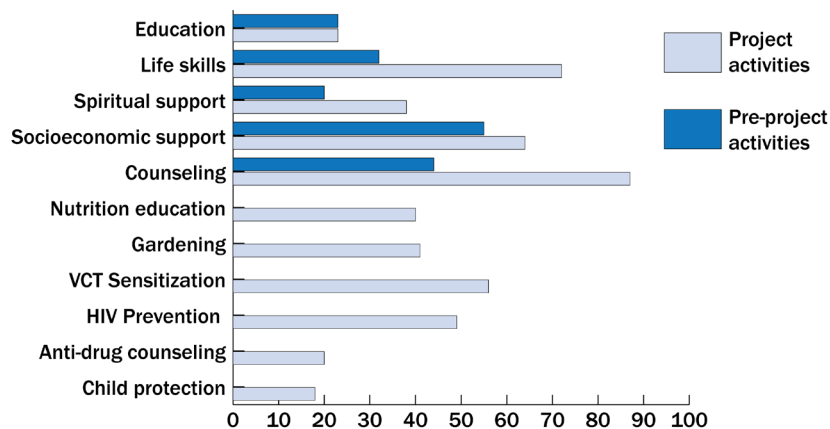
For most volunteers, their work with CRS was not their first experience with OVC. Seventy-six percent of volunteers were actively volunteering with children prior to the OVC program. The majority of volunteers, 67%, had volunteered for more than five years. In correlating performance with number of years as a volunteer, performance was highest among those who had been working from two to four years. Those who had been volunteering less than two years, or more than four years, had lower performance rankings. While this is a trend to be noted, the results were not statistically significant.

In an attempt to understand the significance of personal orphan history, we asked volunteers if their parents were alive. Forty-six percent of volunteers had deceased parents. Of the 46% (117), 59% also reported that they were orphaned as children.

Most of the volunteers, (81%), knew their assigned OVC beneficiaries prior to the project's assignment, and 96% planned to continue assisting OVC after the project ends. Regarding the volunteer's other non-salaried activities, 70% were only working as a volunteer in the CRS project while 30% were volunteers outside of the CRS project.

While 76% of volunteers had been working with children prior to the project, volunteers increased their activities and expanded the variety of their work with children during the course of the project. See Figure 5 for a comparison of volunteer activities prior to, and during, the project. Volunteer's work in helping OVC with education remained static (23%), but their help with OVC in life skills increased from 32% to 72%, spiritual support from 20% to 38%, socioeconomic support from 55% to 64% and counseling with OVC from 44% to 87%. Through training and capacity building, volunteers were able to say they were actively helping OVC with other areas as well, including nutrition education (40%), gardening (41%), VCT sensitization (56%), HIV prevention messages (49%), anti-drug counseling (20%), and child protection (18%).

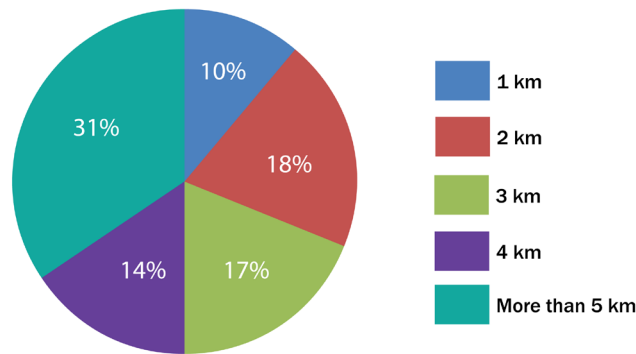
FIGURE 5. Volunteer Activities



Transportation

The volunteer questionnaire also aimed to assess the level of burden on the volunteers in terms of reaching the beneficiaries. Volunteers are going long distances to visit OVC: 31% were traveling more than 5km to visit OVC. The distances were almost equally divided, with 45% traveling 4km or more and 45% going 3km or less (Figure 6). Despite the long distances, 86% of volunteers walk to visit OVC. Only 12% of volunteers used their own bike, 1% had a project-owned bike, and 1% used a taxi-bike. No correlation was found between volunteer performance and the distance traveled or the mode of transportation.

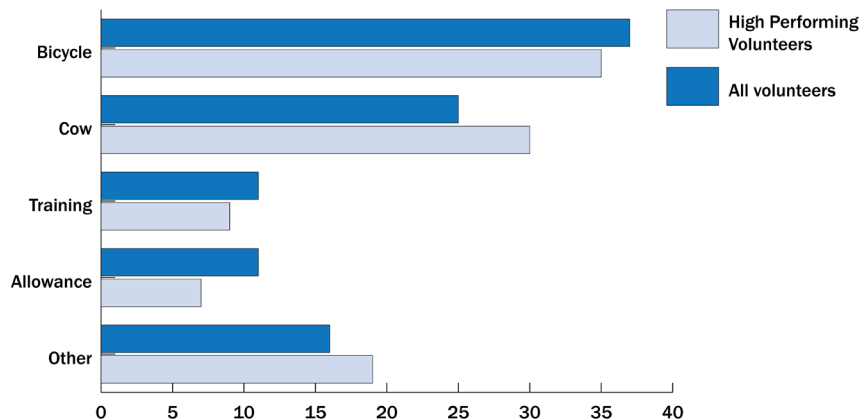
FIGURE 6. Distance to Visit OVC



Volunteer Incentives and Costs

The highest percentage of volunteers ranked a bicycle as their favored incentive (37%). Twenty-five percent chose the cow, 23% the trainings, and 11% the allowances. These figures only slightly changed when the ranked incentives were analyzed according to the performance of volunteers. The highest performing volunteers also ranked the bicycle as their favored incentive (35%) and were slightly more likely to consider a cow as a reasonable incentive (30% of high performers versus 25% of all volunteers) (Figure 7). The costs associated with these incentives are \$100 for a bicycle, \$200-\$1000 for a cow, \$150 per person for training, and \$30-80/month for volunteer allowance.

FIGURE 7. Incentive Ranking



DISCUSSION

This study revealed the busy lives of volunteers, with 30% holding other volunteer positions. Ninety-five percent of volunteers attended church once a week or more than once a week. Volunteers were devout church attendees and also active in the life of their church as catechists or chairs of the Catholic Action Movement. While there was a small correlation between volunteers with heavy volunteer burdens outside of the project and their performance, this was a small correlation without statistical significance.

Volunteers received training (transportation and certificate for workshops), a t-shirt and a goat. Considering the long distances volunteers traveled to visit OVC, and that 86% were on-foot, it was not surprising that the most important incentive desired by volunteers was a bicycle (37%), which averages about \$100. Analysis comparing volunteer performance with the desired incentive revealed that while higher performers also gave the highest rank to bicycles (35%), they were also

were more likely to prefer a cow (30%). Those volunteers who ranked the lowest in performance were least likely to value training as an incentive.

There were no significant predictors of volunteer performance. Demographics—including gender, marital status, education level and occupation—had no significant relationship to their performance. Likewise, religious activities and other volunteer commitments did not have a significant impact on performance. One limitation to note—and perhaps to change in future studies—is that volunteer performance was measured by supervisor surveys. Hence, volunteers who regularly turn in reports on time or have good rapport with their supervisors may be favorably ranked. In future studies, volunteer performance should be measured by the OVC beneficiary to gain a more accurate picture of quality of volunteer care.

CONCLUSION

The project has been able to expand the scope of activities of the volunteers. Volunteers who worked with OVC before the project were most likely to report that they had provided counseling to OVC (87%). The training provided by the project enabled volunteers to add value to their counseling with anti-drug messages and HIV prevention messages. They were also able to give more practical help to OVC in the form of nutrition messages and gardening techniques.

The highest ranked incentive for all volunteers was a bicycle, which at \$100, is one of the most reasonably priced incentives. Giving volunteers bicycles could increase visits with OVC and thus improve the quality of the program. While cows are a very costly incentive, they were clearly valued by the highest performers. Future projects may consider it a worthwhile investment for attracting and retaining the best volunteers. Volunteers also expressed appreciation for training. Considering that past training sessions have expanded the portfolio of volunteer's activities with OVC, they should continue to be prioritized as an incentive and as a quality improvement aspect of OVC projects.

In this study, volunteer performance was measured by the supervisor's ranking. Future studies should consider asking older OVC or caretakers to measure volunteer performance. Alternatively, objective surveys such as the OVC wellbeing tool or the Child Status Index could be used to track OVC wellbeing and analyze volunteer performance.

The volunteers' high frequency of church involvement indicates that they are not regular church-goers, but rather a sub-set of the very devout. Volunteers have always been a sustainable social capital of the church, yet faith-based organizations need to better understand that the volunteers who work in their projects are also involved in parish and community work. In future recruitment, the project should have a better understanding of the recruits' other volunteer responsibilities. The involvement of volunteers in their parish ensures that the project is integrated into a faith community, and is thus sustainable.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information on CRS HIV programs may also be obtained by e-mailing HIVUnit@crs.org.

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