

IVS - Its Characteristics and Purpose

International Voluntary Services (IVS) is a non-profit corporation chartered under the laws of the District of Columbia in 1953. It was organized out of concern for the needs of those people overseas who are to so great an extent unreached by many technical assistance and economic development programs.

Its establishment grew out of a recognized need for a foreign aid facility complementary in nature to church service organizations and the government agencies. In its development IVS drew heavily on the experience of the church service groups, other private organizations and governmental agencies that have been engaged in the kind of work IVS undertakes to do. Its directors and staff were drawn from those whose concern, knowledge of requirements, and pertinent experience qualified them for leadership in such a foreign aid undertaking. The board of directors now includes responsible officials of church service groups, presidents and other highly qualified officials of Land Grant Universities, a former head of U. S. "Point Four" (Technical Cooperation Administration), a leading authority in community development having served in the U. S. Department of Agriculture and U. S. Foreign Service, and others selected for some special competence.

The organization has gained almost ten years of valuable experience under such leadership. It is on the basis of determinations made by the Board and the experience gained that the following statements are derived. They are drafted as a basis for improving IVS and its services, and to make clear its purpose.

Purpose

The primary purpose of IVS is to enable disadvantaged people overseas to find new satisfactions in life - to live more abundantly. IVS men overseas would assist those with whom they work to (1) gain new and rewarding experience; (2) develop new skills and over-all competence; (3) participate more satisfactorily in developmental programs; (4) obtain and use needed assistance that may be available; (5) develop or improve useful local institutions; (6) improve their environment, physical well being and economic status; and (7) enjoy the satisfactions of education in the broader sense of the term.

These benefits are gained principally through efforts toward tangible accomplishments. IVS volunteers work with the people for increasing or improving their food supply, sanitary and health conditions, water supply, housing, schools or other community facilities and gaining income from productions of the land or other sources.

IVS policies, organization, methods and conduct are determined with consideration of its dominant purpose. The nature of what it undertakes to do is such that goals, methods, practices, and rules of conduct cannot be prescribed for its volunteers. A desire to be helpful is the key factor by which IVS volunteers are guided.

Some Factors Determining IVS Policy

The great majority of people in underdeveloped countries are rural and village people dependent on the land, possessing needs that are largely unsatisfied through present foreign aid programs. Also this rural segment of the population is at serious disadvantage for participation in national programs for economic and cultural development. They are prevailingly scattered in remote and more inaccessible areas. They lack organization and institutions favorable for full participation in economic and cultural life. They lack the benefits of experience and educational opportunities that urban people enjoy to a much greater degree.

In addition to these disadvantages the developmental services now operative, including governmental foreign aid, are much better adapted for benefiting industrial and commercially experienced communities. It is significant to note that U. S. efforts in foreign aid have been most successful in the advanced countries of western Europe where capital input, equipment and technology were highly productive.

IVS would extend a supplementary kind of assistance intended to enable those now unable to participate to do so more fully.

The requirements are exacting for working effectively with people to develop in them new aspirations, competence and confidence and to evolve organization and other facilities for expanding cooperation.

One vital and fundamental requirement with regard to so many IVS functions is flexibility. As previously recognized the rural people with whom IVS works are generally ill prepared for adopting U. S. programs or practices, nor is it always important that they do so. The essential considerations in program development in various rural situations differ so widely that well defined patterns cannot be imposed. For these reasons IVS must be responsive to whatever conditions are encountered, of which the human elements are highly exacting.

IVS Posture and Basic Relationships

Most of the foreign aid undertakings may be characterized as taking to foreign countries technology, methods, systems, programs and institutions that should be helpful. The necessity of working through and strengthening the national governments and their institutions seems to call for such an approach. The approach of IVS is a complementary one although distinctly different. The IVSer in a country identifies himself with the people to help them obtain and use all assistance and other resources available.

In such a relationship the IVSer adopts the viewpoint of the people to be benefited and responds to their aspirations, their needs, and their values. He becomes a potential coworker with all who would and can be

helpful, villagers or those from without. Of course he should not become the agent or sponsor for every national program or institution. His primary allegiance is to the people rather than to some governmental agency and its program. He takes into account, for example, that rural people may be unprepared to enter into a prescribed program of agricultural credit that may offer great potential benefit to them. His activities are influenced by the potentiality and the requirements for ultimately gaining such benefits.

It is then understandable that the posture of the IVSer, his methods and conduct would not be the same as those of a technician or agent projecting "his program" to the people with some kind of authority, real or implied.

IVS Program

It is evident from the above that IVS is not a program oriented facility. A "service" is offered rather than a program. The program, if any, of IVS is a composite of programs evolved everywhere an IVSer works. These cannot be appropriately called "IVS" programs nor can accomplishments be represented as of IVS. IVSers are normally participants in cooperative undertakings so that ascribing credit to individuals can be misleading and damaging. It is also inappropriate.

IVS Methods and Conduct

Just as IVS's functions preclude prescription of program, the methods and conduct of IVSers cannot be prescribed. Appropriate methods and conduct derive from IVS dominant purpose and the inherent principles for accomplishing it.

To one having good awareness of this purpose and related principles it becomes clear that certain living conditions are inappropriate for an IVSer. However, the evident or physical conditions of living may vary widely in many respects from one situation to another. Housing that would affect adversely the relationship of an IVSer in the Liberian village may be favorably accepted in the National Education Center in Laos. Determinations are dependent on the ideals and character of the IVSer, his awareness and wisdom in responses, and a sense of obligation to represent the highest ideals of his faith and his country. Specific prescriptions are not appropriate but some proposals and avoidances may be offered as indicative of the appropriate.

It is important that IVS volunteers respect the right of the people they serve to make the decisions affecting their lives. For example, experienced IVSers have realized that it is much more desirable for the people to decide that they want to try some new idea or method than to devise and carry out a project, without their solicitation or participation, for the purpose of showing them.

This is in recognition of the fact that a major benefit of IVS assistance is enabling the people to participate more effectively and

satisfactorily in developmental undertakings. Of such undertakings those that enable many participants to gain and use new skills and knowledge are most desirable.

IVSers would help the people with whom they work to gain self confidence, self reliance and self respect. For this reason volunteers avoid being direct dispensers of relief or charity. Even the distribution of candies to children can have damaging effects. Experienced IVSers realize that man-to-man relationships break down when one becomes the recipient of charity. Of course, this does not rule out being a helpful friend to one in need, nor does it prevent active concern for obtaining and distributing any needed supplies of materials. In the same respect they avoid direct administration of funds belonging to the community or provided for its benefit.

An IVSer enlists assistance rather than making a spectacle of his adequacy.

He would not deprive a co-worker of the opportunity to do a significant thing that either of them might do.

He facilitates the optimum participation by all who can be helpful without prerogatives for self.

He should not be restrained by unnecessary regulations or driven by prescribed compulsions. The compulsion of strong purpose is another thing. It is the source of direction and "driving power" for an IVSer.

An effective IVSer is seen by the people with whom he works as (1) helpful, (2) concerned, (3) understanding, (4) respectful, (5) cooperative and (6) a competent and otherwise worthy American devoted to them and their interests.

Any reflection of arrogance is "fatal" to such relationships and paternalism is almost as bad. For this reason distinction is drawn, in selecting IVSers, between a "spirit of helpfulness" and a "messiah complex."

IVS volunteers are not preoccupied with making friends but doing their job well creates friendships of a most enduring kind.

They are not concerned with selling the "American Way of Life" but as worthy workers toward their primary objective they create respect for their country and its highest ideals and values.

They are not combatants of Communism but they represent a most formidable obstacle to its advancement.

They are strongly motivated by the dynamic of humanitarian or Christian service but refrain from proselytizing or evangelizing.

For implementing IVS policies appropriate guides are developed in each country and by each team. One of these, a "Statement of Aims and Purposes" was prepared by the IVS/Laos team in Saybouri.

"We conceive of man as a creature potentially capable of interacting with nature and his fellow man in such a way as to create conditions that are favorable; spiritually, intellectually, and physically. We recognize man's potential to improve through problem-solving experiences.

"We recognize the need for a portion of a national development scheme to reach the provincial and village level."

"On this level of operations we recognize the necessity of achieving language competency and familiarity with local mores, traditions and habits. We acknowledge the positive value of working through traditional village leadership.

"We recognize the basic need to cooperate with, and, in fact, work through the Lao Government agencies concerned to implement development projects.

"We wish to be dispensers of ideas, attitudes and skills, not things."

"Because of this we shall look for success and satisfaction in such intangibles as changed attitudes or goals rather than in bridges built.

"Specific projects, then, will be recognized as a means to an end and not the end itself. A bridge completed creates confidence, a new well stimulates desire for better sanitation.

"We recognize that projects of community-wide significance do not always have to involve the whole community. They may at times be centered in some individual enterprise.

"At all times we shall move toward the goal of working ourselves out of a job.

"We shall attempt to identify ourselves with the uniqueness that is I.V.S."

IVS is oriented to cooperation with rural or village people in activities that fall normally within the broad concept of community development. At present some IVS volunteers are employed in classroom teaching and technical services that contribute indirectly to IVS basic objectives. This is true especially in Vietnam where teachers and malaria control workers are provided on recently added teams. These principles are adoptable as basic guides for them also.

IVS Volunteers - (1) Selection

The basic qualification for an IVS Volunteer is the ability to identify with rural people and to work effectively with them. Ability in this respect is dependent on purpose and attitude. Of course, he must have experience and skills that are useful in solving the kind of problems that confront rural people. This means ability to work with one's hands and to demonstrate by doing. "Two keys to their (IVS Volunteers) success is their ability to 'lead from behind', and their interest in helping rural people to grow."

Five personal qualities that largely determine success are (1) concern, (2) awareness, (3) responsiveness, (4) resourcefulness, and (5) respectfulness.

The job of the volunteer and qualifications required of him are more fully reflected in the preceding paragraphs. Personnel to meet these qualifications will be limited in supply. This makes it important that those available be used strategically and effectively.

(2) Orientation

Orientation is a vital requirement for IVS service workers. It must be appropriate in all respects for the situation in which they work and the job to be done. As a precaution for meeting these exacting requirements IVS endeavors to give orientation as near as possible to the location in which the personnel will work.

Also the program of orientation should be quite different for the initial party entering a country and for those integrated into an established team. For the latter much orientation can be provided on-the job with experienced fellow team members.

IVS personnel are selected for having appropriate basic training and resourcefulness in the kind of skills that will be useful in rural development undertakings. Most of them have the advantage of having lived and worked on the farm. Their supplementary training and orientation is for the purpose of:

1. Enabling them to communicate satisfactorily with the people among whom they will live and work (language proficiency in the local tongue is essential.)

2. Learning and understanding the customs, aspirations, abilities, mores, and methods of the people with whom they are to work; and
3. Becoming effective participants with local people in devising sound plans for accomplishing their purpose and implementing these plans.

IVS orientation avoids indoctrination that would distract its volunteers from their basic purpose or confuse their purpose. Any impression that they are to transplant North American institutions, systems or practices might be damaging. It is more important that IVSers enter on their job overseas prepared to learn and respond than to have ready solution for the problems encountered. Among other things they should learn of developmental programs being conducted in the country and how their benefits are obtainable.

(3) Supervision and Administrative Support

The nature of IVS undertaking requires that decisions be readily made and action taken at the base of operations--where the volunteers work. In recognition of this IVS delegates appropriate responsibility and authority to its Chief-of-Party who is the ranking representative of IVS in a country. He may have assistants and, in cases where the number of personnel, their distribution or other circumstances justify, "team leaders" may be designated. They act in behalf of the Chief-of-Party for their group and are responsible to him. The most vital functions affecting IVS field operations are assigned to the Chief-of-Party. These functions include:

1. personnel management concerned with (a) assignment of team members, (b) physical and emotional well being, (c) productive and satisfying employment, (d) effective use of special skills and other ability of the various team members, (e) consultation regarding work problems and plans, (f) relationships with fellow IVS team members, host country co-workers, and others, and (g) morale in general;
2. providing language training and orientation;
3. general supervision including evaluation of activities and accomplishments;
4. logistic support including food and housekeeping supplies, available work material and tools, mail, transportation, quarters and authorized funds;
5. maintaining favorable IVS relationships with (a) the contracting agency in the host country, (b) national and local government officials, and (c) other agencies and institutions (public or private);

6. administering IVS funds and other resources allotted to his care; and
7. providing necessary accounts and reports to IVS/W.

The exacting qualifications for an IVS Chief-of-Party are reflected in the duties outlined. He must have broad experience and proven competence in business matters, personnel training and management, and an understanding of rural people, their problems and how to be helpful in their solution.

Thorough orientation must be given to Chiefs-of-Party and Team Leaders regarding all of the functions outlined above. They should understand fully IVS purposes and the basic requirements for accomplishing them.

Reporting

The reporting required by IVS has an important influence on the activities of the volunteers and on their relationship with others. For this reason reporting should be carefully adapted for IVS purposes.

The bases and terms of reporting used by other agencies are, prevailingly, ill adapted for IVS. To call on an IVSer to demonstrate his effectiveness in measurable and statistical terms would tend to destroy a vital quality of his relationships with his co-workers. It would also divert him from his basic objective because it is difficult to measure by standards the changes in the lives of people. Although he takes part in activities that produce tons of food, gallons of water, meters of road, or other tangibles these are considered more appropriately as by-products for IVS purposes. In fact, preoccupation with recognition or "making-a-showing" could be a disqualifying distraction for an IVSer.

On the other hand, periodic evaluation of the volunteers' efforts is vital to effective service. For this reason a major function of the IVS Chief-of-Party or Team Leader is to assist the volunteer in evaluating the situation affecting his work and making helpful adjustments.

The Chief-of-Party and the volunteer concerned should make such records of these evaluations and planning decisions that might be useful. These records made in response to recognized need and usefulness are usually more valuable than reports made by imposed requirements and prescribed form.

The supervisory visits made at least annually by a representative of IVS/Washington make occasion for an evaluation from a somewhat different perspective.

Letters from IVSers submitted for duplication and forwarding to their friends should not be overlooked for their reporting value.

It is undesirable to have IVS field personnel preoccupied with statistical reporting of their efforts, especially where uniform statistical forms might be used.

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