Understanding Volunteering within the ‘Positive Youth Development’ Approach: a case study of the International Citizen Service Program of Nepal

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Abstract

Understanding Volunteering within the ‘Positive Youth Development’ Approach: a case study of the International Citizen Service Program of Nepal

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The purpose of this study is to evaluate the importance of volunteering in the development of youth by using the case study of the International Citizen Service (ICS) - a community-based volunteering program in Nepal. This exploratory study sought to identify the enabling factors within ICS that supported development of thriving behaviors amongst participant youth. The findings revealed that ICS, as a platform, promoted the development of a positive youth and adult relationship, provided experiential learning opportunities, and also, engaged youth as change agents for community development in Nepal. Besides that, the program was found to be implemented following a structure and norm that encouraged and motivated youth to act as role models for other community youth. The findings further revealed these features as helpful to developing a set of four specific ‘thriving behaviors’ namely, competence, confidence, connection and contribution to society as active citizens.
# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VSO NEPAL AND ICS PROGRAM</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOAL AND OBJECTIVE</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRUCTURE OF REPORT</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH IN NEPAL</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTERNATIONAL CITIZEN SERVICE PROGRAM</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH VOLUNTEERING</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION DESIGN</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSUMPTIONS OF EVALUATION</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVALUATION QUESTIONS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QUALITATIVE APPROACH</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA SOURCES AND COLLECTION</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA ANALYSIS</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIMITATIONS OF STUDY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

| Page | 29 |

**CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

| Page | 45 |

**CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS**

| Page | 48 |

**REFERENCES**
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

TABLE 1: DEVELOPMENT ASSETS FRAMEWORK (DAF)……………………………… 20
TABLE 2: STUDY FRAMEWORK…………………………………………………… 27
TABLE 3: THEMES FROM FGD VS DAF AND LERNER’S HYPOTHESIS…………45
FIGURE 1: DEFINITION OF LERNER’S FIVE CS and RESULTING 6th C……… 21
FIGURE 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK…………………………………………22
FIGURE 3: OVERLAP OF THEMES FROM FGD WITH LERNER’S 5 Cs……….46
1. Introduction

The number of young people today stands at 1.8 billion and 89 percent of the world’s 10 to 24-year-old live in poor countries (UNFPA, 2015). The individuals within the age range of 10 to 19 years are adolescents whereas the ones within the age bracket of 20 to 24 years are called young adults (Williams, 2014). Adolescence and the young adult phase of life possess both challenges and opportunities that can affect their life advancement (Keller et.al, 2007). Prevalent poverty and lack of opportunities in poor countries is a challenge for many young people and may prevent them from realizing their full potential. Investment in education, health and wellbeing of youth benefit the world as they bring their energy and passion to fostering meaningful changes around the world (Edwards, 2014).

Listening to, working with, investing in and engaging young people will help in enabling them to build their skills and experiences and turn them into contributing community members of society as well as fostering their own development. Acknowledging youth as contributing members of society and raising expectations of what they can contribute, and providing them with exposure, experience, new opportunities and support will positively influence their development (VSO and Youth Position Paper, 2012).

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a theoretical approach that focuses on an enabling effort by all concerned to develop and create environments and opportunities for young people to harness their interests, skills and abilities in order to allow them to realize their full potential. The trend of focusing on youth both in terms of their overall development needs and the role that they can play in benefiting their society (United Nations, 1995).

Youth volunteering can serve as a means for serving the wider human community; in the process, it is equally beneficial in developing youth human capital. In Central and South America PYD incorporates youth volunteering is widely recognized and appreciated for providing avenues to young people to develop their personal competencies while at the same time contributing to wider community development through greater civic engagement. (Bride et.al,
Taking an appreciative approach, PYD seeks to empathize with, educate and engage children and youth in productive activities (Catalano et. al., 2011).

Though volunteering is defined as a selflessness act without expecting any benefit in return (Gaskin, 2004), it benefits the volunteers as well. The act of volunteering allows the volunteers to identify their strength, areas to work on and also upgrade and enhance existing skills for being more competitive in the job market. The opportunity to volunteer leads to greater self-esteem, development of empathy and active citizenship which facilitates positive youth development (Gunzman, 2012).

Youth volunteering can serve to create a positive change not only at the wider community level but also amongst the young volunteers themselves. The proposed paper by taking a PYD perspective as an approach aims to look at youth volunteering and its perceived impact on the development by youth volunteers. This study takes the International Citizens Service a youth volunteering program being implemented through VSO Nepal in Lamjung, Baglung and Lalitpur districts of Nepal as case study. This evaluation is based on the perspective and perceptions of the participant volunteers.

1.1 VSO Nepal and ICS Program

VSO is an international development charity which started in the United Kingdom, that has been working in Nepal since 1964 to promote social inclusion and community engagement. The thematic focus of VSO’s work in Nepal is in promotion of i) quality education, ii) inclusive governance, and iii) social inclusion (VSO Nepal). VSO’s working approach and strength lies in creative collaborations, sharing thematic expertise and volunteerism (VSO Nepal). VSO also recognizes youth as assets (Youth Position Paper, 2012) and engages them as active citizens in shaping and delivering its development intervention.
International Citizen Service (ICS) is a global volunteering program which offers the opportunity for young people aged 18-25 from the UK and young people from developing countries to work alongside each other on community development projects which aim to achieve positive development outcomes in some of the poorest communities, along with personal and professional development outcomes for both national and UK volunteers, and increase active citizenship. The volunteering placements operate in cycles and each cycle is three months long. ICS is led by VSO in partnership with eight other development organizations and is being implemented in 28 developing countries including Nepal. (ICS, 2011)

The ICS volunteers are not expected to bring specific professional or vocational skills, the activity undertaken is more generic and their activities in the community are focused on peer education, action research, awareness raising, training, resource development and in some instances community infrastructure development. (ICS, 2011).

The ICS program has had seven embedded quality principles and they are:

1. “A diverse range of young people are given the opportunity to participate in the programme;
2. Volunteers are suitably supported throughout the programme to ensure optimal personal development and effective placement outcomes;
3. Every ICS placement must aim to achieve some kind of development impact;
4. Shared working and learning between young people from different countries;
5. ICS volunteers must be an integral part of the community while on placement;
6. Volunteer learning is supported and encouraged through all parts of the journey;
7. ICS volunteers continue their commitment to live as active citizens after the programme is finished.” (Mid Term Evaluation of ICS Program, 2012, p., 22)

ICS allows young people develop their skills and confidence by taking on new challenges. The young people stay in the communities they serve paired with one UK and one national volunteer. The young people are supported throughout their volunteering journey by pre-placement training, supervision and coaching while on placement and post-placement follow up. The program aims to be inclusive and representative of diversity amongst the youth.
In Nepal, the ICS volunteers are directly involved in planning, organization and delivery of non-formal activities in educational and social institutions based placements of VSO Nepal partners whose thematic focus aligns with wider thematic focus of VSO Nepal.

1.2 Rationale and Significance of Study

The transitional period of adolescence is full of challenge for young people when they are not immature children but still have a long path to mature adulthood (UNFPA, 2003). The young people are marginalized as a group and are generally pushed to the edge and their needs are ignored or not properly addressed. The bulge of 1.8 billion youth need support, facilitation and an enabling environment that will move them towards promising adulthood. (UNFPA, 2003).

Given that the youth are the backbone of the nation, the National Youth Policy of Nepal, 2010 acknowledges that it is necessary to make overall development of the youth a priority and include their capacity as part of mainstream national development. (National Youth Policy, 2010). When youth get empowered by gaining the skills to impact their own as well as other’s lives, they will be equipped with the ability to make effective choices and translate their choices into actions and outcomes that lead to thriving lives (Shrestha, 2011).

The study of this program aims to identify the contribution of ICS youth volunteering in the development of youth participants by collecting the Nepalese ICS youth’s perspectives and perceived impacts based upon their own experience. This study does not include ICS volunteers from UK. This evaluation will contribute to the work that has been conducted in Nepal in studying the relationship of engagement in community development with youth development. Similarly, the perceptions and reflections of the volunteers themselves will help VSO to better understand how well its youth led interventions are supporting young people’s development and wellbeing. This evaluation will provide information to VSO and will be useful to revisit its ICS program and improve it to make it more beneficial for personal development of youth participants. This evaluation also gives voice to ICS participants to detail the degree to which they believe that participation in a three month long volunteering program impacted their personal development.
1.3 Goal and Objectives:

The overall goal of study is to assess the impact of participation in the ICS program on the positive development of youth.

The objectives are to gauge from the participant youth’s perspective:

i) the features and dimensions of the ICS program that reinforce, support or contribute to positive youth development;

ii) the perceived positive development impact of participation in ICS.

1.4 Definition of Key Terms

Youth

United Nations define youth as persons within transitional age category of 15-24 and those who are maturing towards independent adulthood from dependent childhood. National youth policy of Nepal defines youth as men, women and third gender aged between 16-40. However, for the purpose of this study we use the ICS definition of youth, that is anyone in between 18-25 years of age.

Youth Volunteering

Youth volunteering is practical action undertaken by youth in the service to others in order to create positive social change for the benefit of the wider community, as well as promoting young peoples’ development (IVR, 2013). This study undertakes youth volunteering as both means and end in an effort to bring about meaningful changes by being involved in community development work and in the process benefit personally as well. For the purpose of this study youth volunteering means participation of young people in community development work.

Youth Development

Youth development is a process by which young people acquire competencies and positive
connections to self, others and the larger communities. (National Youth Development Research Response Initiative, 2003). For the purpose of this study, youth development refers to positive outcomes as a result of the participant youth being part of community development initiatives as an ICS volunteer.

**Positive Youth Development**

Positive youth development is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. This study uses PYD as an approach to explore youth development.

**1.5 Structure of the paper**

This research paper includes seven chapters. In addition to this chapter, the second chapter gives background information on youth in Nepal and the ICS program. Similarly, the third chapter includes a literature review and this will present findings from a number of studies undertaken that are relevant to this research. This will help to contextualize this research. Chapter Four explains the design and methodology of this study. Chapter Five includes findings and analysis and Chapter Six presents a discussion in light of proposed theoretical framework of PYD and Chapter Seven will present conclusions.
2 Background and Context

Introduction

This chapter sets context for study. The first section of this chapter looks at youth and their situation in Nepal. The second section contextualizes ICS program implementation in Nepal.

2.1 Youth in Nepal

Youth is a stage of transition to adulthood and maturity from childhood. From a demographic perspective, Nepal identifies any person between 15 to 24 years of age as youth in its population census of 2001. However, the Ninth Five-year plan (1997-2002) identified youth as those between age of 15 to 29. The national youth policy expanded the youth age bracket by putting the person between 16 to 40 as youth (Sapkota and Chalise, 2012). Youth (16-40 years) account for approximately 40.86 percent of Nepalese population with 20.8 percent falling within the age group of 16-25 years (National Youth Policy, 2010). Like other countries in the world, Nepal is also discussing young people and their agenda with relative seriousness as this growing youth population presents both challenges and opportunities for Nepal (Kharel, 2012). The awareness on both the relevance and significance of youth civic engagement and its potential benefits to society at large is increasing (Bhandari, 2016). Youth policies, a bill on establishing national youth council and a new youth vision 20-25 for the youth development are the plans and strategies that shows government’s commitment toward youth. One of the key objectives of the National Youth Policy is to boost the leadership and engagement of youth in all relevant development initiatives and social movements (Bhandari, 2016).

Seeking opportunities and mobility is common for Nepalese youth. The number of youth migrating to foreign countries in search of work has more than doubled in the past decade (Singh, 2016). International migration is becoming an established feature of the contemporary social and economic landscape for many youth (Bhandari, 2016). In absence of employment opportunities, around three million Nepalese youth have migrated to gulf countries as untrained, unskilled and semi skilled labor (Kumar, 2015). Out of a total absentee population, 29.8% are from the age group of 15 to 29 (Sapkota and Chalise, 2012).
There are nearly 15 percent of youth who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) in Nepal and roughly 80 percent of youth are employed in the non-formal sector (Kumar, 2015). Lack of education and opportunities, vocational training, unemployment as well as under employment in the non-formal sector are key challenges for Nepalese youth (National Youth Policy, 2010). Youth are called the most vulnerable group. There are higher chances of dissatisfied youth to become engaged in negative behaviors and the consequences arising from this can prove to be challenging. (Brewer, 2013). The dissatisfaction of youth can come out through violence and cases of conflict (Kharel, 2012). The manifestation of a decade long Maoist conflict and involvement of young combatants in the armed conflict in Nepal was identified as failure of the state to address the demands of its youth population (Kharel, 2012). It is a challenge for Nepal to engage its youth in the country’s development as opportunities and scope of involvement are very limited due to sluggish economic growth and progress. It is not likely to change drastically in the immediate future. (Upreti et. al, 2010)).

The existing education system and upbringing is key barrier for young people to participate in social action and change process in Nepal as both do not encourage critical thinking and participation of youth at higher level (Sapkota and Chalise, 2012) of decision making. A study revealed that the young Nepalese population have developed an apathy towards engagement in community work and the reasons expressed were lack of opportunities, economic barriers, lack of information, lack of training, lack of time, geographical barriers, socio-cultural barriers and no interest (Shrestha, 2012).

Provision to meet basic needs, protection from all sorts of abuse and exploitation and participation in decision making process ensures youth rights (Shrestha, 2012). Despite youth friendly policies, youth as a whole still face huge challenges in Nepal to make a safe transition into adulthood (Bhandari, 2016). Nepal still is struggling with real integration of the Nepalese youth into the development process. There is a shortage of institutional platforms for employing this resource and transform them as refined and enabled actors in the country’s development (Kumar, 2016). A lot of actions are still to be taken to create space for youth’s voice and agenda rather than limiting it to tokenistic representation. For real youth inclusion, it is important for Nepal to translate the
things on paper to action through meaningful youth engagement from top to bottom (Kumar, 2016).

2.2 International Citizen Service (ICS) Program

The ICS program aims to bring a new perspective and to add value to existing development projects through involvement of youth volunteers. Young people from the UK and developing countries work alongside each other on identified development projects in developing countries including Nepal. ICS recruits young people aged 18-25 from all backgrounds as volunteers. ICS programs run in cycles and each cycle lasts for 12 weeks. ICS aims to encourage social action and support to increase youth volunteering and community participation. ICS aims to provide young people from a diverse range of backgrounds to experience volunteering and be an active change agent. ICS anticipates that realization of its three outcomes, that is personal development of participant volunteers, community development and active citizenship, will in turn help to generate longer-term positive impacts for economical, social and environmental development both in UK and in developing countries. (ICS, VSO, 2011)

International Citizen Service (ICS) believes in the strength of youth and engages youth in leading community development activities and thus provides forum and opportunity for youth to participate and be an actor rather than just passive recipient. In the process of doing so youth get molded as resources through the development of skills. Staying at host homes in working communities for three months help youth to develop strong relationships with the community. The social action undertaken through volunteering provides opportunities for ICS participants to bring about social change.

ICS volunteers participate in local community activities being managed by local development organizations with clear community development goals. The local projects have clear scope for unspecialized volunteers to make a meaningful contribution. The volunteers receive support and trainings before, during and also after the placement is over. They are coached, monitored and supervised throughout their journey by ICS program supervisors, a placement focal person and team leaders. There are forums to receive ongoing supportive supervision through ICS program.
staff and share experience and learning amongst peer volunteers (ICS, VSO, 2011).

The ICS program aims for three key outcomes (Mid Term Evaluation of ICS Program, pn 7, 2013) and they are:

1. Personal and Professional Development of Volunteers
2. Development in Host Communities
3. Creation of Active Citizens

Thus ICS can be taken as an inclusive youth volunteering program that promotes youth participation in community development. The program exerts balance in both youth development and community development outcomes developing close and supported relationships with peers and adults in communities.

2.3 Summary

Young people and their agendas are slowly getting priorities in Nepal. A number of policies and plans are in place that promotes active youth engagement and key of them is National Youth Policy. Nepal has not been able to translate its policies and plans into concrete action plan and ensure its effective implementation to mainstream youth in sustainable development of Nepal.

International Citizen Service Program (ICS) demonstrates how young people as change agent can play a role in community development. However, it also equally focuses on nurturing young people and help them in their development to attain overall goal of community development
3. Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter reviews the work of different scholars who have studied youth development and youth volunteering. The chapter discusses the main theories that deal with youth development and youth volunteering. The theoretical framework for this evaluation study is Positive Youth Development (PYD) and it is introduced in this chapter.

3.1 Youth Development

The acknowledgement of youth as a distinct stage of development started in the early 1900s. The scientific study of youth development called adolescent development until the mid 1990s focused on the deficit based model and took youth as period full of problems and risks which needed either correction or management. Young people were labeled as problematic for society and thus in need of correction (Lerner, 2005). That era looked at three goals covering the entire cycle of youth development: problem solving, preparing youth for adulthood and helping them to get involved as conflicting priorities. (Pitman et al., 2001).

The advancement in youth development, their growing population and an increasing focus on understanding them better facilitated researchers to make a shift and understand that successful development is wider than mere absence or avoidance of problems (Khan, 2012).

The 1990s was the era that started understanding youth from an appreciative approach taking into consideration their strengths and capabilities. Moving ahead from the earlier Adolescent Development lens of viewing youth as a stage to mitigate and manage risk, Positive Youth Development focused on developing their potential and capabilities. This shift in society’s perspective on youth was informed by the need to promote youth to take themselves more positively to lead to socially and economically successful adult lives (Maloney, 2015). The scholars (Damon, 1997, Benson, 2003, Lerner, 2004), practitioners (Little, 1993; Wheeler, 2003) and policy makers (Cummiings, 2003; Gore, 2003) strongly advocated for youth as a resource to
be developed (Lerner et al., 2004) and established the foundation for positive youth development (Maloney, 2015).

Youth development does not have a universal definition. The different contextual meaning and application of youth development is defined as a i) natural process of development of youth and adolescents; ii) a philosophy with sets of principles and approaches that believes in harnessing youth assets and capabilities; and iii) designing and delivery of youth programming focusing on agreed principles of youth development (Maloney, 2015).

### 3.1.1 A natural process of development of youth and adolescents

Youth development is taken as natural human developmental phase during adolescence. Youth development is a natural sequence in human development during which intrinsic human capacity to deal with the adversities and supports of physical, social and environmental challenge evolves (Hamiltons and Pittman, 2004). It is a constant process that compels young people to meet their need to shift to adulthood (Jordan and Norman, 2006). All children and young people are born with this resilience (Benard, 2004). This principle believes in the innate ability of young people to discover and develop their own inner resources or competence that they need to use to grow and mature into healthy and thriving adults. The presence of this inner crucial element helps young people to find their own way forward and be equipped to deal with and overcome future challenges and make decisions that is in their best interest. The choices made during this phase of life are crucial in shaping future life. The entry point to this stage is an immature child but coming out from this stage is an adult who in the process of transition is able to make choices and engage in behavior to lead a thriving life as an adult (Hamiltons and Pittman, 2004).

All youth have the capacity to find ways to: i) meet their basic needs ii) build skills and competence and iii) use the skills and competence even without any assistance (Yohalem & Pittman, 2001). For adolescents to transition into thriving adults, it is crucial to have the best possible development in seven core aspects, namely health, social, emotional, cognitive, physical, cultural and spiritual (Yohalem & Pittman, 2001). An enabling environment and supportive relationships act as a catalyst in this self development process of youth. When the development is optimal, youth can lead a fulfilling, contributing and satisfied life. (Hamiltons and Pittman, 2004).
3.1.2 A philosophy, principle or approach

The evolution of Youth Development in the 1990s took a pragmatic shift to holistic youth development in contrast to the earlier approach of problem solving and prevention. This shift was based on principles of inclusiveness and acknowledgement of youth strengths and capabilities (Hamiltons and Pittman, 2004). This approach identifies youths’ inherent strength and an enabling and supportive environment as the key to develop their social, intellectual and emotional skills. Thus youth development is the facilitation of the overall capacity of building youth to succeed rather than coping with transitional challenges towards adulthood (Holland, 2012). Youth development principles take in youth as people to be nurtured and not as problems to be managed. Youth Development acknowledges the challenges that youth face in the course of development but rather than taking this as a deficit, it takes this as an opportunity to develop them as thriving adults building on strengths and assets that they possess (Holland, 2012). Youth Development involves creation of a range of contexts that promote systemic youth development (Hamiltons and Pittman, 2004).

The realization of these principles is subjected to active commitment and engagement from different individuals and institutions. Youth Development emphasises the role of communities and relevant stakeholders in creating: i) services that meet the basic needs of young people to develop as physically and psychologically fit adults; ii) opportunities for youth to participate as actors to practice and expand on their knowledge base for benefit of others; and iii) supports access to resources and relationship that fosters youth development (Pittman, et al 2001). For optimal youth development, ensured rights in three key areas are necessary: provision, protection and participation. Provision of the basic needs of a youth, protection from all forms of abuse and exploitation, and participation in agendas that affect youth and taking youth as responsible, independent and active citizen (Shrestha, 2011).
3.1.3 Practice

Youth development as practice is the application of youth development principles in action to foster natural processes of human development to promote thriving youth development. This approach asks youth development stakeholders to follow youth development principles in designing and delivering programs or interventions.

Youth Development as a programatic approach means a range of practices, programs and organizations that follow the principles of youth development in postive developmental outcomes for youth. The approach is widely used in the design and delivery of different youth programs in different settings (Hamiltons & Pittman 2004). PYD programs consider the whole continuum of youth development, focusing on the assets or strengths that youth posses and actively engage youth in their own development but also taking into consideration the impact of ecological factors with which youth interact with.

For a program to qualify as being called a youth development program (Lerner, 2011), it should have following key features:

- Promoting positive and persistent relationship between youth and adults;
- Incorporated activities to build key life skills amongst youth;
- Opportunities for youth to practice the learnt life skills both as participants and leaders in activities beneficial for community.

In summary, thriving youth development is not only beneficial for individual youth but the society as a whole also benefits from their contribution. Community based programs serve as good platform for positive youth development.

3.1.4 Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a conceptual pillar that underlies the philosophical orientation of youth development (Khoo, 2008). PYD’s foundation lies in understanding youth development and the promising capabilities that it holds (Khoo, 2008). PYD views youth with an appreciative lens and regard them as fully able persons to pave the path for self-development as
well as to contribute to the development of wider society. This approach focuses on building skills, assets and competencies; foster healthy relationships and to create an enabling environment to foster positive youth development (Pittman et. al, 2001). The PYD perspective is built on the “plasticity-diversity” relationship within development systems theory (Lerner, 2005) which acknowledges youth development as a fusion of biology and context (Khan, 2014). This approach also acknowledges each individual and context as unique and respects their individual capacity and influence over the pace of growth, learning and change amongst youth (Khan, 2014, p. 23).

The PYD framework is better learnt and understood using the following four hypotheses (Lerner, 2005) and these are:

1. Resources and relationships when aligned with individual strength result in youth development
2. Community based programs that includes features of positive adult-youth relationship, skill building activities and opportunities for youth to use these skills to promote youth development.
3. Positive youth development is characterized by 5 Cs, namely competence, confidence, connection, character and caring. When these five Cs are developed, the youth will be able to contribute to self development and the wider community. Thus contribution is the 6th C.
4. PYD and risky behaviors and practices are inversely related.

Thus PYD acknowledges youth potential and emphasizes that optimal youth development is a result of alignment of youth strength with the social and ecological assets and relationships.

3.2 Youth volunteering

People engage in voluntary work throughout the world (Curtis, Grabb & Baer, 1992). There is no universal definition of volunteering as there is no standard practice in volunteering and the role of volunteers vary as per nation, culture and context (Thapa et. al, 2011). Similarly, volunteers are from different age groups and represent diverse backgrounds and skill pools (Curtis, Grabb & Baer, 1992)). However, the wider and commonly accepted definition of volunteering has had three key features, namely unpaid, an action taken out of free will and for benefit of others (Smith,
Thus volunteerism is a manifestation of informed-interest of an individual to serve others (Thapa et. al, 2011). However, it does benefit volunteers as well. (Thapa et. al, 2011). Depending on its purpose and outcome volunteering can be categorized in many different forms, namely mutual aid or self-help; philanthropy or service to others; participation; and advocacy or campaigning (Smith, 2001). Similarly, structure wise volunteering can be either formal or informal. The volunteering that takes place through any organized structure like an organization is called formal volunteering where as the one that is independent of such structure, like on one-to-one relationship, is called informal volunteering. (Ockenden and Stuart, 2014).

Youth volunteering is being identified as a strong means to encourage young people from all spheres of life to participate meaningfully in society (United Nations, 1995). Volunteering is a general term used for many forms of helping activities taken out of personal choice. (Ockenden and Stuart, 2014). The youth-centered practice of volunteering is also referred to by different names like youth action, service learning, community service and civic engagement (Williams, 2014). Similarly, social engagement and social participation of youth is also referred as youth volunteering due to their strong overlapping philosophies (Walsh and Black, 2015). Youth volunteering is prosocial behavior of youth that embraces positive actions and activities for benefit of others with an orientation towards change (Williams, 2014). Similarly, the other definition of youth volunteering also takes this as voluntary and unpaid activities undertaken by young people in relation to some form of social service or need (Walsh and Black, 2015). This is a forum for civic engagement for young people and is a tool for development. (United Nations, 1995). This provides opportunities for young people to engage in positive activities of serving others through collective and targeted learning with peers, adults and communities being served (Kuperminc et.al, 2001).

Youth have generally been viewed from a deficit perspective focusing on personal issues and anti-social behaviour. This stereotyped adult outlook does constrain chances for young people to engage in community action and provide due credit to them when it happens (Pittman, Tolman, 2001). They are generally sidelined citing lack of skills needed to handle and tackle serious issues or make significant contributions through their work. Thus their abilities of making difference and importance of their engagement is undermined. Engaging in pro-social behaviour, like
volunteering, will provide an opportunity for young people to interact with community and make them aware of and able to accept the social norms and moral standards of society (Lam, 2012). Participating in volunteering activities and giving back to community has positive societal value (Murphey et. al, 2004). Volunteering is a means of connecting youth with others. It does develop the ability of young people to empathise with others, respect and care for others, develop an awareness and appreciation of cultural differences (United Nations, 2013). Studies have shown that youth volunteering allows young people to obtain skill enhancement, confidence building and leadership development in collaboration with adults and community based institutions. This adult-youth relationship develops social networks that are crucial for the development of communities and expansion of youth capacities. The support and encouragement from adults leads to promotion of further engagement in civic life and decreases the chances of social isolation and socially negated behaviour (Murphey et. al, 2004). This brings positive changes for the benefit of wider society (Lam, 2012). An encouraging environment and adults as enablers provide the required support, resources and confidence-building for positive development outcomes for youth through youth volunteering. (Ockenden and Stuart, 2014).

Volunteering also provides avenues for young people to get acquainted with realities and challenges of the “real world” and be an actor in addressing the same. This experience provokes their thinking on the greater need of other disadvantaged people and how they as fortunate youth can contribute in making difference in their lives. Through this process they can identify and relate with the community as the place where they belong and can create an influence. (Chan et. al.) Similarly, volunteering gives youth a sense of agency and voice (VSO Youth Position Paper, 2012). The sense of how their activities benefit their communities and increased self-esteem and self-worth develop when their contribution is recognized (Oldfield, 2006). When young people engage in volunteering work, they will realize their potential, gain skill and knowledge and make a significant contribution to the community partner (VSO Youth Position Paper, 2012). Volunteering is a means for youth volunteers themselves to be empowered through the experience and insight they gain. (United Nations, 1995)

Research with British students on their motivation for volunteering came up with three key motives: i) values; ii) employability; and iii) opportunities (Samnegard, 2011). The first motive is
more like giving as they are guided by their beliefs and values of being use to others and to improve things for the better. The second one is more to get something they want to gain such as skills, competence and widening their networks. The third one is to get engaged without specific goals and motives. Volunteering helps young people meet their instrumental and altruistic motivations while serving others.

A number of studies carried out to explore the relationship between volunteering and its effect on youth has found a number of positive effects (Tessier et. al, 2006) on: i) social, cognitive to psychological development (Kuperminc et al., 2001); ii) development of identity and political awareness (Youniss et al., 1998); iii) and reduction of risk factors (Kuperminc et al., 2001) and (iv) development of autonomy and feeling of belonging (Tessier et.al, 2006). Volunteering thus facilitates youth development. (Tessier et. al, 2006).

Though volunteering is a selfless act without expecting anything in return (Gaskin, 2004) helping others benefits volunteers as well as communities (Gaskin, 2004). Volunteering does provide a means of developing skills and gaining career-related experience (Gaskin, 2004) for youth along with the altruistic incentive of satisfaction of being of use to others. The fulfilment of seeing results, a sense of personal achievement, meeting people and making friends (Smith, 2000) are also positive experiences of volunteering. Volunteering acts as a catalyst for young people to engage in different forms of learning that in turn helps in developing skills and competencies like confidence and self-esteem. (Oldfield, 2006). The opportunity to work with adults and peers through volunteering in the community allows youth to master their developmental tasks like identity formation, personal autonomy development and involvement in intimate relationships. This helps in positively influencing prosocial attitudes, developing a sense of themselves and gaining knowledge and skills. (Hamilton, 1998). Participation in community level work leads to psychological empowerment, leadership development and sociopolitical development amongst youth. (Samnegard, 2011).

Youth volunteering facilitates youth development by building character and a sense of identity, providing experience of work, broadening horizons, building networks, easing transitions to adulthood or enhancing skills and experience. This form of civic engagement indeed helps young
people to understand their role and fit within the wider society and helps in identity formation. (Lenzi et al, 2012)

The effect of volunteering on individual benefits cannot be doubted. (Kuperminc et. al. 2001). It prepares them to make a smooth transition to adulthood. Researches have shown that volunteering connects young people with caring adults and responsible peers and engage in skill-building activities that are connected with promoting healthy behaviors. (Lenzi et. al, 2012).

However, all youth volunteering experiences are not equally beneficial. The key consideration in this is to understand the core elements of the volunteer experience that support youth to develop and the social and environmental conditions that enables them to flourish (Dickson et.al, 2013). Effective youth volunteering encourages: i) effective youth participation, ii) is enabling and accessible, iii) adult-supported community actions and iv) support young people’s individual developmental needs. (Irby et. al, 2009). This is further substantiated by United Nations Volunteering program (UNV, 2000) saying that effective youth volunteering programs provide i) opportunities for engagement and reflection, ii) established enabling environment, iii) good volunteer management system and iv) recognition of the value of their contribution.

3.3 Theoretical framework

The Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach takes youth as assets and resources which focuses on their strengths and potential (Lerner, 2005). PYD factors include both internal and external assets. The environmental assets and favorable conditions facilitate nurturing of internal assets that youth posses. Community can serve as a multidimensional setting for young people to exercise agency and contribute in its development and also to their own development (Mastela, 2015).

The Development Assets Framework (DAF) is a framework proposed by the Search Institute in 1990. The DAF identified a set of skills, experiences, relationships and behaviors referred to as assets to enable youth to develop into thriving adults. These sets of skills are further divided into eight sub categories of four internal and four external assets. The framework has been widely
applied in examining positive youth development. The table below provides details of these categories of internal and external assets. (see Table 1)

**Table 1: Development Assets Framework (DAF)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development Assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Assets</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Boundaries and Expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Constructive use of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>combined with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resulting in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thriving Adults</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal Assets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Commitment to learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Positive values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Positive Identity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Five Cs is one of another most commonly used framework for better understanding or discussing Positive Youth Development (PYD) (Figure 2). PYD can be theorized using these five elements namely competence, confidence, character, connection and caring as hypotheses. Organized community action like youth volunteering can serve as an effective setting for PYD. These five qualities thus can serve as indicators for better understanding the outcome and impact of
community volunteering programs that aim to enhance positive youth development (Mastela, 2015). Figure 2, below, provides detailed definition of those 5 Cs and resulting 6th C that is contribution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cs</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive and vocational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one’s global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>Positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bidirectional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school and community in which both parties contribute to relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality) and integrity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resulting in the 6th C

| Contribution | Contributions to self, family, community, and to the institutions of a civil society |

Source: (Lerner et. al, 2011)

Figure 1: Definition of 5 Cs and resulting 6th C
The framework below is used to assess how participating in community volunteering work that have features of supportive relationships, allows youth to make constructive use of time with clearly defined boundaries and expectations lead to develop competence and confidence in youth.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

**Figure 2: Conceptual Framework**

### 3.4 Summary

Youth is a transitional phase of development. The evolution of youth development study has made a shift towards an appreciative approach. Similarly, the need and benefit of youth engagement in community development is also widely being acknowledged. Youth interventions are informed and based largely on PYD principles. Youth volunteering in community is an avenue to promote and practice PYD. Effective youth volunteering program promotes youth engagement in self as well as community development and fosters two way influencing adult-youth relationship. Similarly, such programs are based on the principle of universal access or inclusion and take youth as assets and resources. This type of opportunity is very relevant for youth who are searching for avenues that recognize their strength and provides a platform to harness the same for benefit for the wider community.
4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with choice of design for this study. Further to this, the chapter reviews the goal and objectives of the study. An outline of the data collection procedures are discussed further. The data analysis method and limitations of study concludes this chapter.

4.2 Study Design

This study took the ICS program as a case study or platform for promoting positive youth development. The ICS program engages people aged 18-25 as youth volunteers for community development. This study explored the dimensions and features of ICS program that contribute to positive youth development amongst participant youth. This study used the perspective of participant youth volunteers in assessing the impact of participation on them using Search Institute’s Development Assets Framework and Lerner’s 6 C’s model.

This study used an exploratory approach using qualitative data collection and analysis. The chosen methods were secondary documentation review and focus groups which helped to gather participant’s definition, understanding, insights, values and clarification (Vous, 2006) on how they perceived being benefitted from the ICS program. Use of exploratory qualitative methods helped to make the evaluation information rich and illuminative (Norman and Lincoln, 2000). This also provided the voice of ICS participants and gain insights by listening to them talking about their experiences being part of the program. Thus this study used a bottom-up approach and took participants’ words and perspectives as starting point to identify themes and patterns.

The study seeks to understand how well the ICS program incorporates features of positive youth development and how youth benefitted from being part of this program. The evaluation searches for an answer to these questions from participant youth volunteers’ perspective using semi-structured focus group discussion. During FGD participants are asked about their experience of being part of the ICS program without any mention of PYD and constructed measures related to
PYD. This provides the participants with liberty to come up with their own ideas and stories on the impact of participation. The themes, categories and sub-categories identified from FGD are then interpreted by the evaluator in the context of constructs from Positive Youth Development.

This study included 12 recently graduated Nepalese participants of the ICS program from Lamjung district. The study included two focus group discussions with the participants. To understand the impact of participation, the participants were asked to recall their experience and journey being part of ICS program through a semi-structured focus group discussion. Two focus group discussions with six participants in each of them were carried out.

4.3 Assumption

This study assumed the awareness of participants to accurately and truthfully share their experiences during focus group discussions. Similarly, it was assumed that the information collected from the sample of ICS Nepalese participants was representative of all Nepalese ICS participants.

4.4 Guiding Questions

In order to achieve the study’s objectives, the following questions were used to guide the semi-structured focus group discussion.

1. Features and dimensions of the ICS program that promote positive youth development
   
i) How do you describe ICS?
   
ii) To what extent participants’ response support ICS as a youth development program?

2. Positive development impact of participation in ICS
i) How would you describe your ICS experience?
ii) In what ways ICS program influenced you?
iii) What do you like to recall as most useful elements of program for you?
iv) What is your take away thing from ICS?
v) To what extent do the participants’ responses identify development of thriving behaviors amongst them being part of ICS?

**4.5 Qualitative Approach**

This study used a qualitative approach to assess the presence of PYD features and impact of participation in ICS program by collecting participant perspectives during semi-structured focus group discussions. The qualitative approach provided flexibility for participants to talk about the program and its impact on them in their own way. The FGD did not guide and prompt participants to respond as per the PYD construct. The purpose of using this approach was to assess whether youth spontaneously could identify and confirm presence of PYD elements in the ICS program and its impact on them. When participants of a youth development program were asked to share their experiences, their response were compared to the elements of PYD that characterize quality youth development programs.

**4.6 Data Sources and Collection**

The primary data source for this study were two semi-structured focus group discussions with ICS program participants. FGD captured information about participants’ experiences in the program and how the program impacted them. The table given shows the data sources used to answer evaluation questions and whether the research questions were properly addressed or not? (see figure 4)
Table 2: Study Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective(s) of the study</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Source(s) of data/methods</th>
<th>Notes for analysis (what is the test to be done on the data) (what codes you might use to organize your data)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| To gauge from participant youth perspectives the features and dimensions of the ICS program that reinforce, support or contribute to positive youth development | i) How do you describe ICS?  
ii) To what extent participants’ response support ICS as a Youth Development Program?  
iii) To what extent participants’ response support ICS as a Youth Development Program?  | Focus Group Discussion  
Document Review | Analyze collected data using PYD construct (Development Assets Framework and look for external assets or features and dimensions of ICS program that support positive youth development ) |
| To gauge from participant youth perspectives positive development impact of participation in ICS | i) How would you describe your ICS experience?  
i) In what ways ICS program influenced you?  
iii) What do you like to recall as most | Focus group discussion  
Document review | Analyze collected data using PYD construct (Lerner’s 6 C’s model) |
4.7 Data Analysis

As the data from FGDs were audio recorded, further transcribing of same was done to create a written report. The FGDs were conducted in November 2016. The qualitative data from FGD was analyzed manually using the grounded theory approach. Use of grounded theory allowed discovery of emerging patterns in data and helped to generate theories from data (Chong et al 2015). The reports from both the FGDs were then gathered together and gone through in detail to pick the emerging themes and key words. All the themes were then examined further to come up with data categories and sub categories. These themes, categories and sub-categories then provided the platform for subsequent analysis of collected data using the conceptual framework of Development Assets Framework from Search Institute and Lerner’s 6 C’s.

4.8 Limitations of Study

This study used a sample of 12 participants only out of total 200 graduates of ICS program from Lamjung district. In addition, the study was based on individual perspectives and may not be free from biasness. The study used only a single data collection procedure, thus triangulation of results could not be carried out.
5. Findings and Analysis

Introduction

The first section of this chapter investigates the presence of PYD elements within ICS program from the participant youths’ perspective. The focus is to explore whether and how frequently the participants pronounce and define elements that fall within PYD categories while talking about the ICS program. This will help to answer the first research question that is “the features and dimensions of the ICS program that promote positive youth development”. This will also help to know whether ICS qualify to be called a youth development program with PYD features or is it simply another youth program.

The second section of the chapter looks at impact and influence of participation in the ICS program amongst participant youth again through the lens of the participant experience. The focus in this evaluation is to look at ICS participation and its contribution in developing a range of thriving behaviors to succeed and transition to positive adulthood amongst participants.

The findings from the study are then analyzed and discussed in light of reviewed literature on positive youth development.

5.1 Objective 1: Features and dimensions of the ICS program that promote positive youth development

Findings:

The participants were asked to describe the ICS program and key features associated with it. Thematic analysis of participants’ response led to formation of following key themes.

5.1.1 Relationships and environment

These defining features of the ICS program were identified by the participants; encouragement, help, support and respect from peer volunteers, ICS staff members, host home and other
community members. When these are grouped together it stresses one of the key program elements as the formation of supportive relationships as a key theme and feature of the ICS program.

The participants shared that they felt valued and inspired finding that there were peers and a range of elders to support them and to enable them to be more contributing and effective in their community volunteering work.

.... we had home away from home and family within our host home. For me host father and mother were not only my local guardians but almost as my parents. Their love and care made life way easier for me while at community.

One of the volunteers expressed:

....my host mother always made sure that I finished my meals as I was a fussy eater. She used to say that I had to keep myself fit and healthy to do my work better. This observation and concern touched me. It always felt nice knowing that there was someone to care for you.

The participants thus seemed to value their host home accommodation setting offered by the program and identified this as an enabling feature of the program.

Similarly, the participants acknowledged the role of placement supervisors and team leaders for helping them in defining their workplan for the placements and also making sure that they were provided with the necessary support in realizing those plans. One of the participants shared:

…the placement supervisors asked us on regular basis about our well being and also whether we need any support or help from them.

The importance of support and encouragement from team leaders was also highlighted by other participants. As one of the participants shared:

…one to one with team leaders on monthly basis not only helped me to share progress of my set personal and community development goals but also provided me with the opportunity to get coached and mentored on the areas that I found challenging to deal with.
Another participant shared:

……improved public speaking was a set personal development goal for me. I was not making the expected progress with that. During one such one to one, she asked me about my efforts. I realized that I hadn’t used the available forums much. I offered to organize and lead one fort nightly team meeting. This took me out of my inhibition and I realized that with little push I could work on my weakness area. My teamleader later appreciated my efforts and advised me certain areas to work on for making it even better.

The participants shared that the peers, adults and seniors within program structure and even outside the program supported them to be more effective in their role. The formal and informal relationships they developed with community members made it easier for them to understand the community context better and get things done. The participants expressed that these enabling and positive relationships with adults made them realize that there was a strong support system behind them to make their volunteering experience more enriching and rewarding. This encouraged them to be more responsible and accountable in their behaviour and give their best.

The excellence of a youth development program lies in its ability to foster relationships between youth and supportive, caring adults. The presence of a diverse support system of caring adults strengthens youth by providing additional resources that promote their development (Duerden and Gillard, 2008).

Reflecting on participants sharing, it can be said that ICS program did allow youth volunteers to develop a positive and flourishing relationship with peer volunteers, ICS staff members and other adults in the community. The family bonding with host home members, recognition and appreciation for their action by community members, empowering and respectful relationship with placement focal persons, and team leaders made volunteers feel valued and cared for. This helped volunteers to succeed in their placements.
5.1.2 Youth as change agents and resources in community development

The other feature of ICS that participant youth volunteers time and again highlighted was how youth were taken and mobilized as resources for self as well as community development. Thus ICS was identified as a platform for promoting youth empowerment by participants.

One of the volunteers expressed:

…I am really amazed by the fact that I can create a positive impact and influence in the community through my action. Thanks to ICS for making me realize how a youth like me can contribute to community.

Another volunteer stated:

….it felt great to see my host home kids practicing the personal hygiene practices we talked about and promoted through our lessons at school. These small changes made me realize how positively we touched their life.

They felt a sense of achievement and pride in being useful to the community. The program feature was identified not only as an opportunity to exercise civic responsibility but also teaching participants to exercise and practice self-responsibility. ICS was identified to help volunteers to come out of their inhibition, push themselves further and vision what they were capable of achieving as an individual.

One of the participants highlighted:

…I however, we were not alone in our journey to challenge and push ourselves further. There were other fellow volunteers, program staff, host home and even community members with all possible supports and encouragement.

Another participant stated:

…I was asked to identify and set personal development goal/goals that I wanted to achieve being part of this program at the beginning of the program. I developed an action plan to achieve that together with my team leader. In the process, I got reminded that change lies within me and self perseverance and sincere efforts will result in success. Its me who can serve as change agent for myself.
A quality youth program that promotes positive youth development involves and engages youth as equal partners. It recognizes and appreciates the assets that youth possess and allows youth to practice, learn and harness the same (Lerner et. al, 2005).

The response from participant youth make evident that ICS used youth as resources and mobilized them as resources or change agents for raising awareness and for carrying out other development actions in the community. Besides that, the program allowed the participants to further develop their existing skills like team work, leadership, communication and facilitation etc for their self as well as community benefit by creating opportunities to practice and learn. Thus, ICS can safely be said to be a program that engages youth as development partners and in course of action develop their individual skills as well.

5.1.3 Program norms and expectation

The other feature of the program that the participants identified was the structure and norms of the program and how it was particularly appropriate and very much needed for youth like them. One of the participants discussed the code of conduct they signed as part of program and how that set a limit for them to display and practice appropriate behaviour in the community. The participants talked about the need to dress appropriately, fixed timing to reach host homes, not talking about or challenging religious beliefs of people, not smoking in public places, the need to inform team leaders if they were to leave community even during weekends and the need to inform placement supervisors if they were to be away from placements as examples of clear and consistent rules each of them followed being part of the program.

The volunteers experienced the code of conduct, guardianship of host home parents, regular check in from team leaders as a control mechanism for young adults like them who at times were highly vulnerable to be tempted to break the rules. There were clearly stated consequences of failure to abide by the stated code of conduct. That ranged from a verbal warning, written explanation to being out from the program. The set rules acted as clear boundaries and also served as a tool to practice self-discipline by the youth.
They further shared that they could make sense why all those boundaries were set for them though it was annoying at times. However everyone was of the opinion that the set rules helped them to remain focused on the purpose that they were there for in the community.

The volunteers shared that they were looked upon as role models by school children and young adolescents in the community. Many children aspired to be like them when grown up and this somehow created a kind of responsibility and self awareness in them. ICS was thus defined as a program promoting self awareness on maintaining high standard of behaviour in the community.

Programs that promote positive youth development are expected to follow a structure that is developmentally appropriate, with clear expectations for behaviour as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions (Maloney, 2015).

Participants did identify a set norms as one of the key features of ICS program. The signed code of conduct promoted practice of appropriate behaviour in the community. In addition, their role as a role model for other community youth made the participants realize the importance of exemplary behavior and made them responsible and accountable for their own behaviour.

### 5.1.4 Promoting experiential learning

One other useful feature of the program that almost all volunteers recalled was the experiential learning opportunity that they got and identified themselves as “action learners”. The opportunities that they got to act within their placement and in the community provided them with ample opportunities to design, plan, deliver, monitor and evaluate the activity on their own. This led the participant volunteers to engage in meaningful and productive activities.

Reflecting on one particular event, one of the volunteers stated,

> .. though the theme of the program was pre decided as Sexual and Reproductive Health, we still had enough freedom to choose the sub theme and design and deliver our community awareness action. We chose HIV & AIDS as our sub theme. We researched and identified that
migration was a common phenomenon in our community. Thus our awareness action was exclusively focused on migration and HIV & AIDS.

Another volunteer shared his experience of finalizing the delivery approach:

…once we identified the theme, we brainstormed on delivery approach and zeroed down on street drama. Then started the rigorous work on developing the script and identifying the actors amongst the school children and training them.

The participants reflected on the sheer joy of achievement they as a team felt once the drama was shown to the wider community and the appreciation they received from the community. One other volunteer reflected

…it was widely appreciated, the participants turn out was little less as the event happened to coincide with a marriage ceremony in the community. Thus they took in the reflectory learning that while finalizing the event they needed to reflect on appropriateness of timing and keep account of other major happenings in the community.

The freedom to control the entire event cycle was taken as an empowering learning opportunity by volunteers. Similarly, they shared that the freedom made them more accountable as well. They felt there was a hidden expectation on their part to justify relevance of each action they took and ensure effectiveness and efficiency of its implementation and the accountability to create positive influence through the same. The volunteers shared it was not only about designing and delivering an action, rather it was about the pride of doing something for the benefit of the community. Thus it was all about cherising an opporunity of engaging in meaningful and constructive activities as part of ICS.

Experiential learning allows youth to reflect on their experience and take forward the key learnings from it and apply the same in another real life situation. This allows young people to think, work harder and learn more thoroughly (Owens et. al, 1996).

The response from participants showed that they were involved in a number of community service projects and were working together through an entire cycle of project management. In the proces of doing so they grew and matured, took leadership and learnt the expectation and responsibility that they carried to make the events more meaningful. The opportunities allowed them to apply lesson learnt from previous activities while conducting new ones.
Summary

When the participants referred to ICS program, they identified a number of features within the program that led to the formation of following four themes, namely relationships and environment, youth as change agent in community, program norms and expections and a platform promoting experiential learning. There were other identified sub categories within these four broader themes. When they described relationships within ICS they talked about ICS as a family and pointed to a number of relationships like host parents, ICS program staff, peer volunteers and other community resource people. They expressed that there was a strong support system behind them to make their volunteering journey more rewarding. They talked about the ways in which these relationships supported them to be better and do better. Thus participants identified the ICS as a program being implemented in a safe and secure environment with help, encouragement and support from elders and peers.

Other identified features of the program were the program design and delivery approach of engaging youth as change agent for community development. They identified themselves as resources being used for community benefit and appreciated how they themselves got empowered while leading the process of community action . The program model of youth led community development with clear combined scope for both personal and community development was thus the widely spelled feature of the ICS program by participants.

Program structure and norms and expectation setting was another feature of the program that the participants talked about. The use of the code of conduct promoted self control and monitoring identified as a check and balance mechanism and how this was relevant for youth like them. In addition, the recognition, appreciation and being taken as a role model by the community was recognized as factors leading youth to behave more responsibly and with accountability in the communities.
The ICS was identified as a program that allowed youth to mature through learning by doing. They stated that they were engaged in an entire cycle of community action management. The learning and reflections that they took from one action led to make another action even better. Thus the participants appreciated the program as setting that promoted action learning.

The stated features of the program included elements that were identified as enabling factors that contribute to youth success. The discussion on findings and its alignment with external assets that lead youth to thrive will be carried out in the discussion section.

The emergent themes demonstrated that youth could identify the external development assets and elements that facilitated youth development through ICS.

5.2 Objective 2: Impact of participating in ICS program

A number of research questions were asked to understand the impact of participation in ICS amongst Nepali volunteers. When youth engage and participate in a community development program, it allows them to contribute towards the community. However, the focus here is to understand the association between participation in youth volunteering program and development of thriving behaviors amongst the participants (Lerner, 2005). The questions revolved around recalling their experience, identifying their most and least liked elements from program and also revisiting the influence and impact participation had on them. The response from participants led to formation of following key themes.

1. Skill building
2. Self Confidence
3. Relationship Building
4. Serving Others
5. Being an active citizen
6. Respect for diversity/Role Model
5.2.1 Skill building

Participants shared that ICS provided them with a platform to learn and develop a set of soft and hard skills. They expressed that the opportunity helped them in increasing their competence.

Referring to awareness raising through community events they organized, one of the participant shared:

.....organizing community events which were kind of mini-projects helped in increasing my planning and organizing skill.

The volunteers identified the opportunity to lead events useful in developing their leadership skill. ICS allowed youth to take leadership in designing and delivery of many community actions ranging from awareness sessions to lesson delivery in school and community settings. Similarly they referred to organizing many sexual and reproductive health promotion events conducted in the community. All these were provided as examples by volunteers that led to develop their leadership skill.

Cross cultural communicaiton and working with people from different cultures and contexts was identified as another key skill learnt by the participants.

One of the participant shared:

.....ICS was unique as it gave me cross cultural working experience which I otherwise would have never got through other volunteering or community work. This experience surely instilled tolerance in me and made me more open-minded.

Another participant added:

... ICS helped in building my communication skills. First, I would say polishing my English language skill. Besides that, it also helped me in learning formal communication skill. I am now comfortable to make formal community presentation and to facilitate community level group discussions and meetings.

Team efforts and working with others was another key skill that the volunteers highlighted having learnt during the program. They shared that working in a team developed their skills to gain mutual trust and develop and foster long term relationships.
In his 5 Cs as a model to examine thriving youth behavior, Lerner defined competence as a “positive view of one’s actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive and vocational”. As per Pitman (2006), competence is an internal youth ability that leads them to act effectively in different settings and situations namely in school, society and at work.

The participants identified a number of cognitive and social abilities that they developed being part of ICS program. This showed that ICS provided them with the environment and opportunities to take on tasks where they were needed to learn and practice certain soft and hard skills. The prevalence of such opportunities led participants’ youth to gain competence.

### 5.2.2 Self Confidence

Many participants stated ICS was beneficial in gaining and developing self confidence. They shared that the program made them set goals for their own personal development and commit to them. In the process of designing an action plan to achieve set goals and also seeing them materialized, they developed self confidence. Similarly, ICS allowed young people to take on the challenge to develop their confidence.

One of the other participants shared:

…. I enjoyed the experience of being a change agent in the community. As I had no social work background, I was a bit skeptical in the beginning about my fit and contribution to the program. During action things got started unfolding naturally and I enjoyed the process of discovering what worked and what did not in the interest of community. But I always had been empathetic towards people. The feeling of contentment that I got from this community engagement is priceless. It won’t be surprising now if I pursue my career in the development sector.

Another participant stated:

….. I had never been to a rural and remote community. My worry of being part of the program was to stay and enjoy basic minimum facilities offered in the community. But I challenged myself to come out of my comfort zone of city life. Now, if someone asks me about the best part of
the program then I will definitely say host home accomodation. The love and care that you receive there can not be matched. And it is not always about material things.

The recognition and appreciation from community members were also identified as confidence booster by participants.

One of the participants shared:

.....one of the teachers from my placement school requested me to deliver a talk session in her neighbourhood on menstrual hygiene. She shared that she was impressed with what we delivered and followed through in the school. She said that would be beneficial for her community as well. It felt great. That made me realize, we, as youth, have the potential to influence. Small efforts that we put as ICS volunteers did matter to the community.

For participants, ICS helped participants to become more confident of and and develop their own capabilities. The recognition and appreciation they received from the community for the things they did and the support and encouragement from the program team made them realize their capabilities. Witnessing the impact and influence they could create in the community made the volunteers value them more and develop positive attitudes towards life.

An internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy, one’s global self-regard, as opposed to domain specific beliefs is what confidence is all about (Lerner, 2005). It is self-efficacy and mattering (Bottomley, 2013). This is the belief in one’s capacity to succeed (Pitman, 2006). Recognition and appreciation from elders of what youth did in the community and seeing results of their action made youth value their efforts and develop confidence.

5.2.3 Relationship building

Many participants reflected on the relationships that they developed as part of program as an important outcome for them. They shared the opportunity connected them to a wide array of people and institutions which were very valuable for them. And for many of them the relationship with other 19 fellow volunteers was most precious.
One of the participant shared:

……ICS was almost like a family feeling. It was as if we 20 volunteers along with team leaders embarked for the journey with the same vision and goal. It never felt being alone despite some downtime. The feeling of being surrounded by a strong support system made me feel safe and secure. The community members, host families and school children were like extended family members. I already miss them.

One of the participants shared that staying in host home helped them to integrate into the community easily. Another participant shared:

……I had my placement peer volunteer encouraging when I felt low and cheering when I was doing good. This support and encouragement motivated me to do better. My friendship with him is going to last life long.

One of the participants expressed:

… ICS was a big zigsaw puzzle and we individual volunteers were a part of it. Each pieces were equally important and at the same time incomplete and valueless without each other. Program staff, community members completed the puzzle. A strong team spirit and a sense of belonging was very evident through this saying.

One of the participants recalled being supported by a Female Community Health Volunteer (FCHV) during her community actions:

……I was short of materials to deliver a SRH awareness session and the female community health volunteer provided me with a number of resource materials and flip chart. Not only that she also offered to look through my session plan. She said that she by no means was superior to me in terms of her SRH knowledge but she had been doing that over a period of time. This made me feel, she was interested and willing to support what I was doing by devoting her time and energy.

The participants cited examples where they did identify different relationships and support structures that facilitated or supported their community development work. The volunteers expressed having developed a number of enabling connections both within the formal program structure and outside the program.

Connection as outlined by Lerner identifies positive bonds between people and institutions like individuals with peers, family, school and community. ICS allowed youth participants to indulge in community volunteering with a feeling of safety, structure, and belonging developing positive bonds with people and social institutions (Pitman, 2006).
5.2.4 Serving others

The theme of serving others was frequently referred to by participants as a key impact through ICS. ICS introduced them to real life challenges and hardship and developed the care, compassion and empathy towards people. One of the participants shared:

…….Thanks to ICS for introducing me to the real Nepal and its challenges. Its being in the community for past three months, I got to know how hard and difficult life is for people out here. We talk about retention of girl child in school and they lack basic provision of toilets with running water. How embarrassing it is for girls to survive school for five days in a month while they are on their period.

Another participant shared:

…….ICS taught me to be more considerate. I worked with a counterpart who was from a different country and context. I always reminded myself to make sure that my counterpart didn’t feel left out not understanding the language. I used to summarize the key discussion points to him in English.

One of the participants shared:

…….it felt nice to see that my small efforts, time and energy being used for the benefit of the community. We, as ICS volunteers, were touching the lives of many adolescents. They found friendship and companionship in us. We were there to listen to their SRH issues and work together with them in identifying ways to address the same.

The examples cited did identify a number of ways ICS drilled a feeling of care and compassion amongst the participants. A feeling of sympathy and empathy (Lerner, 2005) were evident in what ICS participants shared as having felt while serving others.

5.2.5 Respect for Diversity/Role Model

One of the impacts through ICS was highlighted as the experience helping the volunteers to better understand the existing cultural diversity, prevalent disadvantage, marginalization and discrimination in the community. This made them more sensitive and empathetic towards peoples’ needs and more respectful towards different cultures practiced in society. Similarly,
acknowledgement from the community as role models encouraged them to be more responsible and accountable for their behavior. One of the participants shared:

…it is amazing to see how impressed the school children and young adolescents are from us. They share, they would like to be like us when grown up. I guess it’s the behavior that we modeled that impressed them. This further inspired and motivated us to behave appropriately in the community.

Another participant shared:

….. it was wonderful to find that adults held high regard for us and our work. During one community function, the secretary of the village development committee cited our example and said, its youth like us who were the resources for our community and who were positively influencing other children through our positive behavior and action on community awareness. This further encouraged us to be the role model for community children.

Lerner (2011) explains “character is respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (morality) and integrity”. ICS volunteers did express the opportunity exposing them to the real world and encouraging them to respect and appreciate diversity and the uniqueness of the community. ICS allowed youth to remain connected to their roots and values and encouraged them to take responsibility and model exemplary behavior.

5.2.6 Active Citizen

Another theme that emerged while exploring the impact of participation in ICS program was the intent of youth to be an active citizen contributing to the welfare of self and the wider community. One of the participants shared:

…and the journey doesn’t stop here. There is action at home project that we have to run at our respective community. That could be any event ranging from awareness activity to lobbying to publication of an article. The event should reflect our learning and takeaway message from the program. There is flood of ideas. I hope to reach out to many other people through my action in sensitizing them to take their respective roles as active citizens.

Another participant shared:

……I want to study further majoring in natural resource management. I want to be an expert in better managing natural resources and avoid environmental degradation.
One of the participants shared:

…..being an active ICS alumni, I aim to spread my learning to other youths. I hope to work out ways with VSO Nepal in how we can do that.

Lerner identifies contribution as a result and action from thriving youth who already posses 5 elements namely character, connection, care, confidence and competence. Contribution is an effort to make a difference. Lerner further defines this as active participation and leadership of youth in a variety of settings. ICS did ignite that feeling in youth exposing them to the real world and making them experience how they as youth can contribute for the same.

5.3 Summary:

ICS participants were asked a number of questions during FGD to determine the impact participation had on them. Their responses led to formation of following six key themes namely skill building, self-confidence, relationship building, serving others, active citizen and learning to respect diversity and being a role model.

Opportunities to develop a range of soft and hard skills and practice the same for benefit of community came out as the main outcome of being part of the program. Participants recalled undertaking a number of action learning events where they could practice and learn a set of soft and hard skills. Participation in those action learning opportunities led youth to develop and apply skills in a practical setting.

Similarly, ICS participants identified increased self confidence as another outcome being part of the program. Having taken a leadership role in community action, seeing results of taken action and recognition and appreciation of community made ICS participants more confident, responsible and accountable.

ICS connected participants with peers and other community members who were part of their journey of community volunteering. The prevalent support structure and program delivery model had clear scope for participants to develop a number of positive relationships. These positive
relationships enabled volunteers to be more effective in their community development work and remain connected to positively influencing relationships.

The participants identified themselves being more caring, compassionate and empathetic as result of ICS. The program provided the participants with exposure to real challenges and hardship. Besides that, as part of program they dealt with a number of people from different contexts, cultures and backgrounds. These real life experiences made them more compassionate and empathetic.

The expectation, appreciation and recognition of volunteers by adults and other community members made them model and practice exemplary behavior in the community. Being in the community for three months made them see and appreciate the diversity in the community.

The volunteers expressed their interest to be an active citizen and contribute towards their society in all possible ways.

Participants reflection of their ICS experience and the impact of participation led to the formation of six key themes which align with five Cs of Lerner and the participants intend to engage as active citizen post program and contribute to the community which again is the outcome of development of those 5 Cs amongst youth. This is further discussed in the following chapter.
6 Discussion of Results

This exploratory study was carried out with two main objectives. The first one aimed to look at features and elements of ICS- a community based youth volunteering program through participant youths’ perspective. The evaluation expected to identify the features and enabling external contextual factors of the program that benefitted youth to thrive.

The concept of development assets developed by Search Institute (2007) identified a number of external assets under four broad categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time as enabling factors to foster positive youth development. Similarly, the hypothesis from Lerner (2011) proposed three key characteristics of positive youth development programs, namely positive and sustained relationships, skill building activities and opportunities to use those skills in community-based activities. The FGD with ICS participants led to the formation of four key themes as main features or enablers within ICS program which can be placed against these identified characteristics of youth development programs that follows PYD practice. This points to the fact that ICS provides the external assets to promote positive youth development.

Table 3: Alignment of themes from FGD with Search Institute’s External Assets and Lerner’s Hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Assets (Search Institute)</th>
<th>Theme from ICS Focus Group</th>
<th>Lerner’s Hypothesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Supportive/ Encouraging/Inspiring relationships and caring environment</td>
<td>Positive and sustained relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Youth as change agents and resources in community action</td>
<td>Skill Building Opportunities/ Use of those skills in community based activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries and Expectations</td>
<td>Set norms and values and code of conduct of program Inspiring and caring peer Role models/high expectation from children/adolescent and other community members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive use of time</td>
<td>Engagement in experiential learning activities</td>
<td>Skill Building Opportunities/ Use of those skills community based activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similarly, the second objective of the study was to explore the impact of participation and resulting thriving behaviors. Lerner (2005) identified a number of characteristics possessed by thriving adults and when we plot the findings from FGD against Lerner’s 5 Cs we can see a strong match between both. These five qualities served as indicators here for better understanding the outcome and impact of ICS community volunteering program in positive youth development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme from FGD</th>
<th>Lerner’s 5 Cs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill building</td>
<td>Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Confidence</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship building</td>
<td>Connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Serving others</td>
<td>Caring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect for diversity/Role Model</td>
<td>Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being an active citizen</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3: Overlap of themes from FGD with Lerner’s 5 Cs**

The findings from FGD with ICS participants indicated that participation in program did help youth to develop a range of soft and hard skills like leadership, communication, team work, facilitation etc. and thus make constructive use of time which is one of the enabling external development assets (Search Institute, 2007). The youth experienced the community environment and support structure within program from adults like community members, host home parents, placement supervisors and team leaders enabling, making their ICS journey more fruitful and enriching and this again correlates with a feature of positive youth development programs which is the importance of positive youth/adult relationships. The higher expectation and trust of community members, recognition and appreciation and being looked upon as role model by adolescents and children from the community made youth responsible for their action, made them practice self-discipline and increased their self-esteem. This again correlates with the element of positive youth development and the importance of creating an enabling environment for youth to practice positive behavior.
The findings from this evaluation has been consistent with reviewed literature that highlighted how a youth development program through the features of fostering relationships between adults and youth, experiential learning opportunities and boundaries and expectation can enable youth to succeed.

Nepalese youth are in need of platforms that employs and enable youth (Kumar, 2015) in the country’s development. ICS as a program is identified by youth as a place that allows meaningful youth engagement for community development. This also has scope to support the National Youth Policy objective of boosting the leadership and engagement of youth. However, the scope and geographical focus of program is limited to three districts only. This calls for wider availability of such programs so that greater number of youth could benefit from the same.

The focus of this study was limited to understanding the ICS program, its features and impact from participant youths’ perspective. The study did answer those questions establishing ICS as a youth volunteering program that incorporated features and enablers that fostered characteristics like competence, connection, character, confidence, sense of caring and contribution in them. This was a perceived impact established through focus group discussions. The study did not measure the degree and extent of those identified thriving behaviors amongst the participants.

Mobility is an identified phenomenon for Nepalese youth (Bhandari, 2016). Programs like ICS can instill the deep sense of connection of youth with their communities and might be helpful in retaining or even the returning of migrated youth to their respective communities, or contribute for their respective community being anywhere in the world.

However, the study didn’t focus on exploring the sustainability of impact on participants. The retention of three months’ participation effect and follow through mechanism was not discussed during the study. The participants did identify their intent of being an active citizen and work together with VSON as active alumni but clear roadmap of sustaining the impact created through participation needs to be thoroughly thought through by VSON.
7. **Final Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

Community volunteering programs with combined features of community development and youth development was found to be useful in supporting youth to thrive and a number of features were identified as crucial and integral from participants’ perspective. Key were facilitating and supportive relationships, recognizing youth as assets or equal partners in development, scope for action learning and making youth take the lead and be accountable and responsible for their action. Programs with such elements support youth to develop competence, confidence, connection and motivate them to contribute self-development as well as community well-being. This type of program is particularly important in context of Nepal where youth lack opportunities for engagement and forums that promote experiential learning. These types of programs will also help youth to escape the apathy they have developed toward community work and help them to regain connection with their communities and motivate them to contribute towards the same through active engagement. This further identifies the need for stakeholders (family, community, entire nation or even the whole world) to think of ways to incorporate those identified elements in youth’s daily experience so that they transition towards successful adulthood. Based upon the perspective of the participants, the ICS program promotes positive youth development.
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