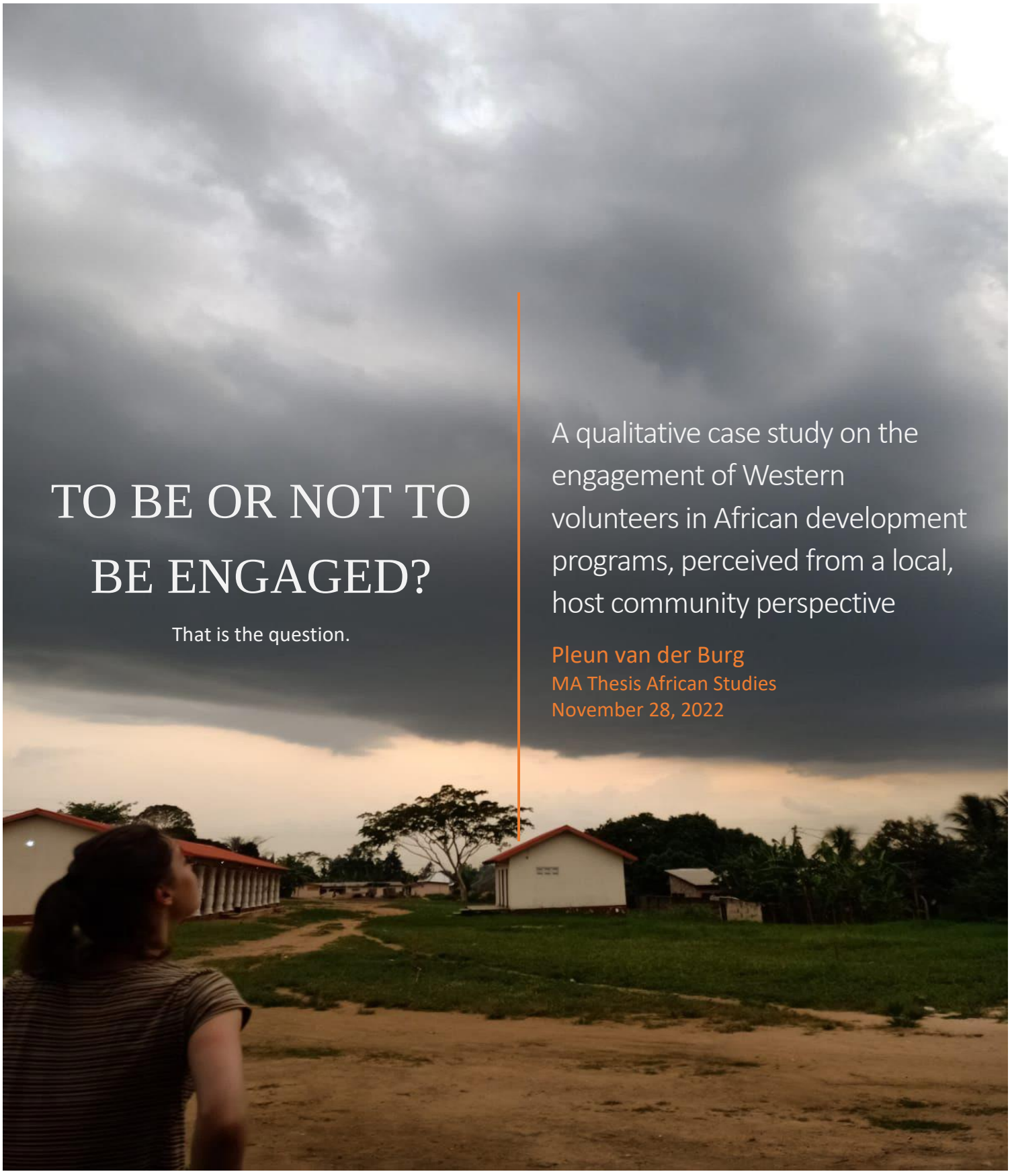
To be or not to be engaged? That is the question.

Burg, Pleun van der



TO BE OR NOT TO BE ENGAGED?

That is the question.

A qualitative case study on the engagement of Western volunteers in African development programs, perceived from a local, host community perspective

Pleun van der Burg

MA Thesis African Studies

November 28, 2022

Leiden University, the Netherlands

Supervisor: Prof. dr. M. Dekker
Second reader: Dr. A. Akinyoade

Word count: 19251

Image cover page reference: Personal archive. Taken in Tinkong, Ghana, March 2022.

Abstract. During the late twentieth century, international volunteering has become one of the fastest growing trends in traveling. The rise of the voluntourism sector has been accompanied by a rise of research on this matter. Yet, compared to volunteers and volunteer tourism organizations (VTOs), host communities receive the least attention in studies on voluntourism. This research has been devoted to bring forward the local, Ghanaian perspective on Western volunteers in community development projects. Results from semi-structured interviews with community members of Tinkong, Ghana, indicate that support from outside, including from Western volunteers, is considered necessary for Ghanaian communities to further develop. At the same time, true contact between volunteers and hosts mostly lacks, which forms a profound barrier to the establishment of cross-cultural interaction. Besides, the way participants speak of Western engagements reveals that their judgement is not just based on the kind of work that Western NGOs or private organizations do, but that it also strongly relates to factors that go beyond the impact of volunteers themselves, such as Ghana's political situation. More longitudinal research on voluntourism helps in working towards the holistic, multi-disciplinary understanding of the topic that is needed.

Key words: voluntourism; Ghana; host perspective; Western engagements; community development

Preface

To be or not to be engaged.

The main drive for writing this thesis stems from my own experience as a volunteer in Ghana, five years ago. Back then, I spent one month in Kwamoso, a tiny village located in Ghana's Eastern Region, where I was enrolled in a care and community project that consisted of reconstructing and painting houses to keep them protected from Ghana's heavy rains, combined with assisting as a teacher and supervisor at a local primary school. I remember I came back home with the belief that my effort and contribution to the project truly had an impact on the lives of the people of the host community. I never asked them. I just assumed.

In the years that followed, the more I learned about development cooperation, the more my initial optimism changed for feelings of doubt and sometimes even guilt. Did I actually contribute something to the community I was in? Wouldn't it have been better if my activities were done by a local instead? After all, in only a month time our group of volunteers managed to finish about eight houses in total. Perhaps if a professional would have done the work, the pace would have been higher and more houses were reconstructed.

Seeing things in a broader perspective, what most of all kept me thinking was the issue of whether it was 'my place' to be there and whether 'we Western people' should be engaged at all in African countries the way we are right now. In other words, I wondered whether this whole concept of voluntary work in the name of fostering development to – what are considered – 'underdeveloped countries' truly makes the difference it claims to make.

At the introduction day of African Studies at Leiden University, my classmates and I were asked to introduce ourselves by choosing one out of many postcards that were spread out on a large table in the middle of the classroom. The card we chose had to represent our answer to the session's opening question: "what brings you here?". I was one of the last people to come forward and pick a card, but luckily the one I had already in mind was still there. The card I chose displayed a handle located in the cockpit of an airplane. "Engage" and "disengage", the instructions of the handle said. When it was my turn to stand up and introduce myself in front of the class, this was exactly what my answer to the opening question was: I was hoping to find an answer to the question to what extent it is desirable that Western people are engaged in the development trajectory of African countries. I shared my volunteer experience of 2017 and the doubts that followed from this. "So", I concluded, "for me the personal question I hope to answer this academic year is *to be or not to be engaged?"*.

While some students smiled because of this Shakespearean exclamation, from that moment on the working title of my thesis was there.

My thesis allowed me to go back to Ghana twice this year and to start with my search for answers. During summer, I successfully conducted my research and assisted in the projects of the Live Now Foundation as part of my internship for Ontmoet Afrika, hosted by the community of Tinkong. I even got the chance to go back to Kwamoso several times, to visit my host family of 2017. It all felt like a full circle.

Still, after conducting my research internship I realized that despite all the fruitful data I had obtained, the bigger questions that were on my mind for all these years remained unanswered. In fact, the more I visited Ghana, the more I came back with new questions to be answered and new answers to be questioned.

Luckily, my experiences in the field and most of all the large amount of conversations I had with my academic supervisor Marleen Dekker, my internship supervisor of Ontmoet Afrika Niko Winkel, my teachers at Leiden University, the staff of the Live Now Foundation, the community members of Tinkong, and all my friends and family back home, brought me closer to understanding the meaning of all the different perspectives I encountered in my search for answers. Through these conversations, I came to terms with the fact that perhaps, some questions will always remain open and in some cases, the truth simply lies in the eye of the beholder.

I want to express my gratitude and appreciation to all the people mentioned above for supporting me prior, during and after the research process, and for guiding and inspiring me with their constructive feedback, honest reflections, insights and advice. Of course, a special thanks goes to all the participants of this study, who always welcomed me with the greatest hospitality and never felt bothered to sit down with me for hours and talk about topics related to my research and beyond. Without them, I could not have fulfilled this research.

Finally, I want to thank the reader in advance for the time and effort to read this thesis.

- *Pleun van der Burg*

Utrecht, November 2022

Content

1. Introduction

During the late twentieth century, international volunteering as a tool for development support has become one of the fastest growing trends in traveling. It is estimated that on a yearly basis, between four and ten million people engage in short-term missionary trips, with travel expenses up to two billion dollars (Anderson, Kim, & Larios, 2017). To a large extent this growth has been fostered by the rise of the volunteer tourism sector over the last recent years, that emerged as a new actor within the field of development. The sector is shaped around "tourists who, for various reasons, volunteer in an organised way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2001, p.1). Volunteer tourism, or *voluntourism*, has become a large sector mainly in the Western world[1], with the US, Canada, and Europe functioning as important supply markets of volunteers. Apart from countries located in Latin America and Asia, African countries are among the most attractive destinations for volunteer tourists worldwide, with Ghana being one of the leading African destinations (Keese, 2011). Keese (2011) attributes this to the fact that Ghana is marketed as "peaceful, democratic, English speaking and exemplifying typical African village life" (p. 265). Besides, Ghana's historical involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade established a long history of contacts with Europe and America and left many historical resources along the coast, of which the Cape Coast Castle, the Elmina Castle and Fort St. Jago became UNESCO world heritage monuments (Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014). Up until today, Ghana's diversity and rich history make the country appealing to volunteer tourists (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021). The most popular voluntaristic activities in Ghana consist of working in orphanages, teaching English to school children, working in the medical or health care sector, or providing support in the fight against HIV/AIDS (Global Crossroad, 2016).

The rise of the voluntourism sector has been accompanied by a rise of research on this matter (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). Not only did statistical studies appear that analyse trends of this new branch of tourism (e.g. Lamoureux, 2011); much attention has also been devoted to the underlying motivations of volunteer tourists – think of the infamous "white saviour

[1] This study follows the modern meaning of the Western world according to the World Population Review of 2022: "…all of the countries of Western Europe, as well as those countries shaped by Western European culture". For that reason, apart from countries located in Europe, the Western world here also refers to the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

complex" (Bandyopadhyay, 2019) – for instance by analysing their criteria for choosing project locations (e.g. Keese, 2011), understanding what factors influence their experiences (e.g. Otoo & Amuquandoh, 2014), or by focusing on the volunteer tourism organizations (VTOs) that mediate between volunteer tourists and host communities. Such VTOs mostly operate from North America and Western Europe (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021). Although volunteer tourists and VTOs are important actors of voluntourism, little attention in research on volunteer tourism so far has been devoted to the third pillar of this tourism industry: the host community (Wearing & McGehee, 2013). In fact, the majority of perspectives within the volunteer tourism literature is rather one-sided, as the nature of this industry is mostly studied from the perspective of VTOs themselves (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021). This is not without consequences. As Ferguson (2006) rightly observes, there is the tendency of the Western world to categorize Africa as a stereotypical concept that is mostly characterized by the "lacks and absences, failings and problems, plagues and catastrophes" of the continent (p. 2). Almost poetically, he therefore asks:

> "Do accounts that cast Africa as a land of failed states, uncontrollable violence, horrific disease, and unending poverty simply recycle old clichés of Western presence and eternal African absence—as if the earth, like the moon, had a permanently darkened half, a shadowed land fated never to receive its turn to come into the 'light' of peace and prosperity?" (p. 10).

To shed a new light on a field of studies that has mostly been analysed from a one-sided perspective, this study aims to bring forward the local, African perspective on Western volunteer tourists in community development projects. It does so by building upon earlier research by both Western and non-Western academics, that critically examines the ethical questions that surround the field of development cooperation and voluntourism. This is not to say that this study holds a negative stance towards Western engagements in African developmental projects per se. Rather, it aims to work towards the more holistic, multi-disciplinary understanding of the topic that is needed (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021; Pastran, 2014). The findings of this study stem from qualitative research conducted in Tinkong, Ghana, that has been home to a privately owned development program for many years now. The running projects in the community are supported by Western, mostly Dutch, volunteers and interns. Hence, the majority of the host community members is experienced with the presence of such volunteers in their direct environment.

In order to better understand the context in which voluntourism is placed, the following section provides a literature overview of the most important trends of the concept of development and its actors. This overview leads to the research question of this study, that is presented in chapter 3. Chapter 4 then introduces the conceptual model and theoretical framework that function as a guideline in processing and structuring the findings, after which chapter 5, 6 and 7 are devoted to the methods, results and discussion of the research respectively. All additional material can be found in the appendices.

2. Literature overview

This literature overview provides an overview of the concept of development and the role of its various actors, both in past times and in contemporary practices. To guarantee for a multi-disciplinary perspective, theories from various disciplines are reflected in the theoretical background of this research, including articles originating from tourism and tourism management journals (e.g. Bandyopadhyay, 2019; Keese, 2011; Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015; Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021; Wearing & McGehee, 2013; Wright, 2013); development studies (e.g. Escobar, 1992; Goldin, 2018; Gore, 2000; Gupta, Pouw, & Ron-Tonen, 2015; Jolly, 2005; Kapoor, 2002; Ziai, 2015), with subdisciplines such as economic development (Anderson, Kim, & Larios, 2017), international development, and sustainable development (Adams, 2020; Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005); politics and international relations (Masters & Chatzky, 2019; Vestergaard, 2008); peacebuilding (Hancock, 2017); and social sciences (Boeije, 2010; Doorewaard, Kil, & Van de Ven, 2015).

The literature overview is structured as follows. First, the history of development is analysed by zooming in on both Western dominated views as well as African perspectives towards development. Then, section 2 focuses on the main actors of development. Resulting from this, section 3 discusses the rise of voluntourism as a development actor. Then, section 4 deals with the perceived knowledge gap when it comes to research on voluntourism. Finally, this chapter closes with a brief recap in section 5.

2.1. The history of development

2.1.1. Western dominated views

The Western concept of development knows a long history that is rooted in classical political economy and ancient philosophy. Already around 350 BCE, Aristotle came up with the concept *eudaimonia* to refer to well-being and human flourishing, which holds the idea that doing well, behaving well, and faring well will eventually lead to happiness: the highest good in human life (Wolbert, De Ruyter, & Schinkel, 2015). Also later in history, during the eighteenth century, classical economics combined economic and philosophical thought. Many of them are now known as the early pioneers of development thinking, such as Adam Smith and his ideas about opulence and self-respect, but also Karl Marx, Thomas Malthus, and John Stuart Mill (Goldin, 2018).

For a long time, the main strategy for development has been to increase economic growth in what were called *underdeveloped* or *less developed* countries. Gore (2000)

describes the essence of development as a strategy to mobilize and allocate resources and to design institutions in order to "transform national economies and societies, in an orderly way, from a state and status of being less developed to one of being more developed" (p. 789). Indeed, already in the 1930s development planning was concerned with economic planning and early industrialization, often in the name of political and economic nationalism. The trajectory of industrialized countries that were considered to have experienced a "successful development process" (p. 791) was set as an example for less developed countries, in spite of their different external situations (Gore, 2000).

After the Second World War, the idea that development cannot simply be reduced to economic indicators gained momentum. Debates over the meaning of development and the means to achieve it characterized the decades that followed. During the 1950s and 1960s, such debates were mainly concerned with strategies for growth, dualistic approaches to development, and the role of human capital (Gore, 2000). More emphasis on social objectives alongside economic growth – e.g. "income distribution, poverty, employment and basic needs satisfaction" (Gore, 2000, p. 791) – appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. The imposition of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) according to the Washington Consensus of 1989 further spurred the awareness that "growth alone is insufficient, as is evident from the continued prevalence of dire poverty and persistent – or expanding – inequalities in many countries which have enjoyed sustained growth" (Goldin, 2018, p. 4). Gradually, the notion that development is not equal to economic growth led to new approaches to development within the academic debate.

One piece of work that contributed in particular to the practice orientation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies was written by Robert Chambers in 1994, in which he introduces his idea of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). PRA is a methodology that enables local people to have control over their own development, rather than allocating mostly Western development personnel this control. Hence:

> "He [Robert Chambers] devotes a lot of space in his work deriding the top-down methods used by some of these personnel, underlining how PRA stands for enhancing the learning, not of outsiders, but 'insiders', and how PRA is participatory, not extractive (…)" (Kapoor, 2002, p. 104).

Chambers thus places the value of agency by local communities above the dominant idea of imposing external knowledge and plans on these communities. Although many

definitions for agency have emerged, in line with Hancock (2017) agency is here perceived through the lens of human needs theory[2] and consists of "active interaction and participation, productive work, a sense of belonging, elements of autonomy and the ability to exercise choice" (p. 259). The idea of agency that Chambers puts forward draws attention away from the thought that economic growth and external measures alone foster development, and provides room for a focus towards the rather social and cultural dimensions of development.

Another influential alternative to the modernist, growth perspective on development came from Amartya Sen. In the 1980s, Sen introduced his capabilities approach, which provides a moral, theoretical structure for the move towards a human-oriented approach, stressing the value of human agency and personal autonomy (Stewart, 2019). The two normative claims that underlie Sen's capability theory are: "First, the assumption that freedom to achieve well-being is of primary moral importance. And second, that freedom to achieve well-being must be understood in terms of people with capabilities" (Felibert Centeno, 2020, par. 2). In other words, in Sen's analysis development is viewed in terms of the capacity (e.g. freedom) that people have to achieve certain valuable goals or to do something or be someone with the income at their disposal (Goldin, 2018).

After Sen, new alternatives to development kept emerging, shifting the focus on economic growth as the main goal of development further towards social indicators of development. Development was no longer solely viewed as GDP growth, and human development emerged as a more appropriate goal and measure of development (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998). At the same time, also the idea of reconciling the environment with development gained influence. Among others, this led to the sustainable development approach (Gupta, Pouw, & Ros-Tonen, 2015), which was inspired by a combination of a more people-centred human development focus (Jolly, 2005) with more awareness about the environmental impacts of development. From this, new concepts such as green economy and green growth emerged, that promote economic growth within environment limits (Gupta, Pouw, & Ros-Tonen, 2015). Sustainable development thus not opposes itself from economic growth, but rather calls for different forms of growth that emphasize human development, participation in decisions, and equity in benefits (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005).

With the invention of the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) in 2010, indicators for measuring development further expanded with the inclusion of health,

[2] The fundamental argument that human needs theory stresses, is that "all people have basic needs, that all needs are either fulfilled or denied, and that when needs are denied, individuals will struggle to have those needs met, even if those struggles results in antisocial or violent behaviour" (Hancock, 2017, p. 259).

education, and standards of living (Goldin, 2018). The idea of capturing a broader range of development indicators was a consequence of the appearance of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000, that presented "clearly identified and measurable shared objectives for the 189 national signatories" (Goldin, 2018, p. 72) to measure a country's degree of development. Following from this, in 2012 the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offered a framework for ending poverty and hunger and addressing the decline of biodiversity and climate change (Adams, 2020). They built on the idea that future escape from poverty could only come from a growing global economy, and that nature should be thought of in economic terms as well (Adams, 2020). Sustainable development and the SDGs became iconic for the way Official Development Assistance (ODA) – or *foreign aid* – is organized today (Goldin, 2018).

2.1.2. The African response

Inevitably, the dominant views on development stemming from ideas and practices by Western thinkers equally spurred perspectives towards development and Western engagements from the African continent itself.

First and foremost, attention should be paid to the Pan-Africanism movement that, roughly speaking, emerged as a result of the transatlantic slave trade that took place from the fifteenth century to the nineteenth century. Not only did the slave trade lead to the creation of the modern African diaspora[3], it also spurred Pan-Africanism as a movement, which evolved as:

> "…a variety of ideas, activities, organizations and movements that […] resisted the exploitation and oppression of all those of African heritage, opposed and refuted the ideologies of anti-African racism and celebrated African achievement, history and the very notion of being African" (Adi, 2018, p. 3).

Describing the historical development of this movement, Adi (2018) highlights the perspective of Pan-Africanists in relation to prominent African institutions such as the African Union (AU). The AU has been installed in 2002 as the successor of the Organisation of

[3] The following definition is used for the modern African Diaspora: "[it] consists of the millions of peoples of African descent living in various societies who are united by a past based significantly but not exclusively upon "racial" oppression and the struggles against it; and who, despite the cultural variations and political and other divisions among them, share an emotional bond with one another and with their ancestral continent; and who also, regardless of their location, face broadly similar problems in constructing and realizing themselves" (Palmer, 2018, p. 217).

African Unity (OAU), with the vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena" (African Union, 2022b). Among the goals of the AU, of which achieving "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and their people" is listed on top, attention is paid to the development of the continent, both in terms of economic, social and cultural levels. In 2015, the AU installed Agenda 2063. This Agenda involves 20 goals that together envision a united and strong Africa, by offering a "concrete and implementable framework with a clear vision", that aims to further develop the continent in a sustainable and inclusive way (African Union, 2022a). The agency New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) is the implementing arm for the strategy of AU's Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2022c), and bases itself on the premise that "Africa could renew itself by embracing globalization and in partnership with the big powers" (Adi, 2018, p. 216). From a Pan-Africanist view, NEPAD received criticism on this premise. Among others, critics pointed to the fact that because of this approach, African governments were embracing values that were seen as rooted in the Washington Consensus and Eurocentrism, such as good governance, democracy and the concept of the free market (Adi, 2018).

The Pan-Africanist point of critique on NEPAD pinpoints a relevant ethical tension that underlies the concept of development cooperation between Africa and the West as a whole, namely the – "should the West be engaged at all?" – matter when it comes to the development trajectory of African countries. Already in 1992, anthropologist Escobar stated that the problem with development is that "it is external, based on the model of the industrialized world" (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998, p. 362). He therefore pleads for a grassroots approach to development, meaning that the focus should essentially be on the local[4] and that notions in line with anti-capitalism, anti-market, or anti-imperialism should be expanded (Escobar, 1992). Critique on Western donors and international organizations in African countries is equally visible in the years that followed. Ayodele et al. (2005) for instance argue that "helping Africa is a noble cause, but the campaign has become a theater of the absurd—the blind leading the clueless" (Ayodele et al., 2005, p. 1). They observe that aid created dependence instead of increasing development, despite the more than 500 billion dollar that has been spent in foreign aid in Africa between 1960 and 1997. What is more, they argue, the Western countries that invested the most in African aid, mainly countries in Europe, America,

[4] The local in this regards comprises "peasants, urban marginals, deprofessionalized intellectuals [with] an interest in culture, local knowledge, critique of science and promotion of localized, pluralistic grassroots movements" (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998, p. 362).

Japan, and some Asian countries like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore, all believed in free markets (Ayodele et al., 2005). This brings back the illustration of the influencing capitalistic narrative after the Cold War. The likelihood that aid may effectively promote democracy will only increase when the role of strategic or geopolitical factors in allocating aid diminishes, Dunning (2004) argues in his research note about the conditionality of foreign aid.

In the case of Ghana, former President Jerry Rawlings cooperated with the World Bank in 1983, agreeing to the implementation of SAPs in the country. Even though at first, Ghana's economy seemed to benefit from this strategy and was considered a success story and even a role model for Africa, twelve years and more than four million dollars in loans later the World Bank admitted that "declaring Ghana a "success story" was a mistake and not in the country's own best interest" (Ayodele et al., 2005, p. 3). Ayodele et al. (2005) add to this that also the way Ghana's political elite dealt with the poverty-reduction loans provided by the World Bank negatively impacted the effectiveness of the loans. This latter point relates to the notion of "elite capture", which implies that in societies that receive service delivery funds such as Ghana, sometimes only selective parts, people or groups actually receive benefits from such social funds (Dutta, 2009). In other words, resources that are meant for the benefit of the masses are "usurped by a few, usually politically and/or economically powerful groups, at the expense of the less economically and/or politically influential groups" (Dutta, 2009, p. 3). Even though corruption manifests itself in many different ways (also by non-elites), Dutta (2009) argues that corruption is the most common measurable manifestation of elite capture. Unfortunately, it is indeed the case that corruption still prevails in many African countries today. Ghana is even listed in the top three of Sub-Saharan countries whose citizens perceive an increase of corruption (Transparency International, 2015). Obviously, with issues of elite capture and perceived corruption at place, initiatives for development are at risk of failing to achieve their primary target. This is where bottom-up approaches such as Robert Chambers' PRA methodology[5] come into play, that stress the need of doing politics "with transparency, honesty, humility [and] respect" (Kapoor, 2002, p. 106). Defining corruption in societies such as Ghana should however be done with caution. As Alolo (2007) explains:

> "In [these] societies, where the collectivist culture requires public servants to bestow favours on kinship/community networks, as a moral obligation, officials are often faced with the

[5] See page 11.

dilemma of either succumbing to the requirements of their collectivist culture or submitting to the law" (p. 207).

It goes beyond the scope of this research to deal with the issue and underlying workings of corruption in more depth. Yet, it stands out that this is a complicated topic that requires cautiousness in drawing conclusions, regardless the country or region of focus.

On a final note, despite all considerations and points of critique on investments by Western countries in Africa, the impact of Western dominated views on development in African countries and concretely on the AU approach cannot be neglected, especially with regards to the main focus of this research. For instance, even though Agenda 2063 is primarily concerned with the development trajectory for Africa, the AU does link Agenda 2063 to the aforementioned SDGs by the UN. Although the scope of the SDGs is more confined than the scope of Agenda 2063, "by implementing Agenda 2063 Member States will ipso facto be meeting global obligations under the SDGs" (African Union, 2022a). Of particular interest in the context of this study is the emphasis that the AU places on volunteerism to achieve Agenda 2063 and the SDGs. In fact, in collaboration with the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, in 2019 the event "Promoting Volunteerism and Exchanges in Africa" was held in Rwanda, with the aim of discussing how Africa can position volunteering as a mechanism that contributes to the achievement of the SDGs (UN Volunteers, 2019). Since volunteers only account for one out of many actors that are involved in international development cooperation, the following section provides a brief overview of the most important actors within this field.

2.2. Main actors of development

Depending on the specific function they carry out, development actors include individuals, groups, and agencies that organize themselves in institutions or organizations, such as governments, parastatals, community based groups, or civil societies (Essien, 2021). Development actors function as important agents that have "the capacity to take responsibility for [people's] lives, and (…) make decisions that result in action and achievement" (Essien, 2021, p. 1515), with which they play an active role in the process of development.

Several categories have been created to structure development actors. For instance, a commonly made distinction concerns the categorization of "old" versus "new" actors in development (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2017). Here, "old" refers to the actors that were involved in the very first decades of development cooperation, which mostly

concerns the member states of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that provided the "main share of global Official Development Assistance (ODA) in hierarchical relationships with clear lines between benefactors and recipients" (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2017, p. 1070). Back then, development support was primarily perceived from an economic angle, meaning that ODA mostly consisted of monetary flows from donor countries to the so-called aid recipient countries, defined in terms of their per capita gross national income (GNI) as published by the World Bank (OECD, 2022). "New" development actors concern the state and non-state actors that entered the field of development cooperation from the start of the new millennium on. These actors are considered new because they established new cooperation programmes or re-emerged as cooperation providers (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2017). The actors range from new global powers to private foundations, religious organizations, or grassroots movements.

Development actors can also be structured along their level of action, ranging from the local to the national and ultimately the international level. Mwije (2022) uses such a hierarchal categorization to graphically display all different layers of development actors in a pyramid structure. The first level he identifies is the individual level, followed by the household level, the community level, the organization level, the local government level, the national level, the regional level, and finally the international level. Starting from the top of the pyramid, the concrete development actors that follow from this hierarchal structure are the state, the market, civil society organizations, donors, academia, media, community members, and finally all other individuals that are involved in development processes (Mwije, 2022). Philanthropic organizations and NGOs fall under the categorization of civil society organizations (Mwije, 2022), which includes VTOs. Because of this classification and the rise of the VTO sector from the start of the new millennium on, VTOs are part of the new actors of development (Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2017). The rise of this new actor and the different perspectives that it brought along is the focus of the next section.

2.3. The rise of voluntourism

The emergence of new communication technologies at the beginning of the 1990s allowed NGOs to expose the vastness of misfortune and human suffering to a wide audience (Vestergaard, 2008). This marked the decades that followed by the upcoming trend of gap-year tourism among British and European youth. Big events that shocked the world such as the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the Indonesian Tsunami of 2004 spurred people to engage in

philanthropic practices worldwide (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015). Thailand for instance went from three volunteer projects in 2003 to 176 in 2007 (Tomazos & Butler, 2009), and also other countries affected by the tsunami experienced a similar increase of volunteer tourism projects. Alongside these engagements and the increasing growth of the voluntourism industry, opinions on the effects of Western voluntourism as a tool for development gradually got divided, largely due to the influence of critical postcolonial scholars (Pastran, 2014).

On the one hand, there are those in favour of this type of support. Obviously, most of all advertising VTOs point to the benefits of volunteer tourism to the tourist, for instance by stating that "the goal is for the participant to travel and see as much as possible of a certain area while spending a short period of time contributing to a certain issue" (Volunteer World, n.d.). Also the added cultural value of interacting with host communities for tourists is often mentioned. Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2015) for instance mention the improvement of cross-cultural understanding for volunteers – that is: "the basic ability of people (…) to recognize, interpret and correctly react to people, incidences or situations that are open to misunderstanding due to cultural differences" (p. 385). They attribute this to the perceived positive long-term impact on the civic attitudes and wisdom of volunteers, and on their openness and appreciation for other cultures.

On the other hand, however, critics point to the potential harm that voluntourism can do to host countries. The industry could for instance foster "inefficiencies and dependencies in local communities, spur orphanage trafficking and corruption, and even disrupt local power dynamics by reinforcing negative cultural stereotypes" (Lamoureux, 2011, p. 5). Most exemplary here is the issue of Western volunteers working in orphanages. Once it became clear that institutions in the Global South such as residential care facilities and intermediary voluntourism organizations deliberately put children with existing families in orphan institutions to benefit from the underlying business model – an "orphanages need orphans" line of reasoning (Rosenberg, 2018) – a wave of objections followed (Richter & Norman, 2010). Not only did a global campaign follow that discourages Western volunteers to volunteer in orphanages abroad; in 2018 Australia even became the first country in the world that criminalizes the recruitment of children into orphanages as a contemporary form of slavery (Lu, 2020).

Another visible trend among critical scholars is the categorization of voluntourism as neo-colonialist. Bandyopadhyay (2019) for instance argues that the similarities between colonization of the past and the current voluntourism industry are too significant to ignore, and observes that "there is still the division between the superior Global North and the inferior

Global South that heeds back to colonial times" (p. 330). This line of reasoning is also visible in the work of postcolonial scholars, who derive from the idea that contemporary legacies of colonialism are still visible in the way structures of oppression and colonial relationships between postcolonial geographies are organized (Pastran, 2014). Simultaneously, however, there are also scholars who use this postcolonial lens to argue against the idea that voluntourism is neo-colonial. Wearing for instance argues that there is room for the equalization of historically neo-colonial relationships and the maximization of potential benefits of voluntourism, as long as there is recognition for the tourism industry's colonial past and the willingness to move towards a more conscientious postcolonial future (Pastran, 2014). This recognition however becomes problematic if there is limited knowledge available on how the host community experiences the voluntourism sector and the Western volunteers that it brings along.

2.4. Researching the experience of the host community

In their literature review on voluntourism, Wearing and McGehee (2013) identify several reasons for the aforementioned lack of research on the way host communities experience the voluntourism sector. Among others, they observe that:

> "…this lack of focus on the host may derive from the difficulty in identifying and including the full spectrum of stakeholders who may fall under the terms *host* and *community*. Issues of power and socio-economic status often prevent the full participation and inclusion of marginalized groups as part of the community" (p. 124).

Apart from the issue of defining and including all members of the community, also the fact that tourists are more accessible to research than the host community is mentioned.

> "Specific to volunteer tourism, members of the community are often inaccessible or unable to participate, due to socio-cultural, economic, or language differences, and hosts also often do not have an awareness of the scope and breadth of volunteer tourism activities within their communities, nor do they think of those outsiders coming to assist with programs as "volunteer tourists"" (p. 124).

Luckily, although limited in number, studies that explicitly focus on the host community perspective do exist, and they are useful in identifying possible factors that impact

the host perception on Western engagements. For instance, in their study on volunteer tourism in Ghana, Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021) find that the extent to which VTOs show awareness of the host community's social and cultural structures is important for preventing problematic cross-cultural interactions between the volunteers and hosts. They link this finding to intercultural sensitivity, a concept introduced by Kirillova, Lehto, and Cai (2015), that refers to the ability to discriminate and experience pertinent cultural differences, and is "related to the extent to which a cultural difference is internalized by an individual" (Kirillova, Letho, & Cai, 2015, p. 385). Aspects of intercultural sensitivity could for instance entail the attention paid by volunteers and VTOs to covert power dynamics in host communities, by following guidelines related to community entry (e.g. "the 'courting' of traditional authorities such as chiefs, elders, and local government officials of the town", Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021, p. 6). As the degree to which volunteers show intercultural sensitivity impacts cross-cultural interactions between hosts and volunteers, the perceived intercultural sensitivity then also impacts the perception that the host community has towards these volunteers.

Another aspect that Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021) find to be of influence on the perception of hosts towards volunteers and VTOs is the level of agency held by the host community. The hosts interviewed in their study indicate to experience agency through host-guest interaction, for instance when volunteers relied on the hosts to learn from their expertise or to ask questions about the local culture and language. This enabled hosts to assert themselves "as those persons to whom the volunteer tourists turned to for education and direction once they arrived" (p. 6). Indeed, as the definition of agency[6] by Hancock (2017) highlights, active interaction and participation are important constitutive factors to the feeling of agency. In the same way, Robert Chambers mentions the idea of a reversal of learning in his work, stating that "outsiders must be the ones to learn from the people they purport to be helping or teaching" (West, 2011, p. 39). The importance of agency found by Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021) thus fits with Chambers' approach of enabling local people to have control over their own development (Kapoor, 2002).

Then, also the way the voluntourism sector is portrayed in general impacts the perceptions of both Western tourists and host communities. Wright (2013) explains that due to a lack of clarification on the nature of volunteer tourism, misperceptions about the industry hinder the move towards sustainability and prosperity. Tourists for instance often see their

[6] See page 12.

voluntary activity as something altruistic that simultaneously boosts their CV, rather than as an experience in which there is a mutual gain of knowledge from the community they visit (Wright, 2013). It is for that reason that "hosts have a far more negative perception of volunteer tourism than tourists, and that altruism is not perceived as prominent within volunteer tourism tourist motivation by hosts" (Wright, 2013, p. 246). In other words, if volunteers seem to be motivated by a rather one-sided expectation of voluntourism – that is: they will visit the host community to first and foremost help its members, rather than to simultaneously learn from them – this negatively impacts the perception that hosts have towards these volunteers.

2.5. Recap

Altogether, this literature overview aimed to provide more insight into the concept of development and the role of its various actors, both in past and contemporary practices. Emphasis has been placed on the way dominant Western notions of development shaped African perceptions on it. In particular, attention has been paid to the voluntourism sector that functions as a means for international development cooperation, and to the little research that has been conducted on the host community perspective towards this topic.

From the discussion of the literature it stands out that there is a tension at place in the field of development cooperation between the West and Africa, as it is surrounded by questions of ethics and morality. Van Dam and Van Dis (2014) even argue that "development cooperation is one of the most morally polarised fields of policy" (p. 1637), hereby signifying that when discussing development cooperation:

> "We need to take into account how different ideas and practices of development cooperation have been substantiated as competing moral claims. Such a perspective makes clear that development policy at any time cannot be reduced to the workings of a single motive, but was usually over-determined" (p. 1637-1638).

Van Dam and Van Dis (2014) call for an understanding of the working of development cooperation that highlights all motives and interests at stake, and not just what they call "the twin categories of altruism and self-interest" (p. 1637). This side note matters with regards to the aforementioned holistic, multi-disciplinary understanding of voluntourism that is needed (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021; Pastran, 2014).

In the following section, the research question of this study is presented. This question builds upon the insights derived from the literature overview, aiming to further contribute to the creation of knowledge on the host perspective towards voluntourism. Before going to the research question, it is important to mention that this study does not aim to provide answers to the ethical or moral considerations that might come up, especially given the political sphere that the topic is embedded in. Rather, this study wants to invite the reader to keep the debate on the effects of Western voluntourism as a tool for development cooperation in African countries nuanced, open and inclusive (Pastran, 2014). Presenting the host community perspective on voluntourism through the findings of this research is one way of contributing to this debate.

3. Research question

This research contributes to the perceived lack of knowledge on the experiences of African host communities in development programs that involve Western volunteers. Led by the research question: How do Ghanaian communities that host development programs experience the involvement of Western volunteers in this type of international development cooperation? – this study aims to bring forward an often overlooked perspective on voluntourism as a practice of development in a range of other development practices within the academic debate. After all, so far mainly the Western, VTO perspective is highlighted in studies on the effects of voluntourism (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021).

In addition, the study also has practical implications. A higher understanding of the experiences and perceptions of African people that are engaged in international development cooperation initiatives fosters knowledge on what is actually needed and desired in voluntary work. This helps in making the practice more sustainable and efficient in the future (Pastran, 2014). Besides, this study offers insights that are relevant for Western volunteers, students, researchers, and other practitioners with an interest in Africa. A better understanding of the host perspective on development practices fosters mutual intercultural sensitivity and interaction, cross-cultural awareness, and cooperation (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015).

4. Conceptual and theoretical framework

The theoretical background of this study brings forward several concepts that are of relevance when examining the host perspective on Western volunteers in their community. To allow for a narrow scope, the theoretical framework zooms in on three factors specifically, that are considered most applicable to the focus of this research. Building on the literature in section 2.4, these concepts involve:

- *Intercultural sensitivity*; here defined as the perceived awareness of the host community's social and cultural structures by Western volunteers, according to community members themselves (derived from Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021).
- *Local agency*; here defined as the degree to which local people perceive they have control over their own development, both as individuals and community members (derived from Kapoor, 2002).
- *Motivation volunteers*; here defined as the motivation of Western volunteers to participate in a voluntourism program, as perceived by the host community members (derived from Wright, 2013).

Together, the perceived intercultural sensitivity, local agency, and the perceived motivation of Western volunteers function as independent variables in the conceptual model below, and are thus expected to have an impact on the dependent variable of this research: the African host perspective towards Western volunteers in their community.

Then, there is also a fourth, moderating variable included in the conceptual model, that is expected to influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This moderating variable is labelled as project satisfaction:

- *Project satisfaction*; the extent to which participants are satisfied with the development program that is taking place in their community, thus seeing it as useful and contributing to the overall wealth of the community.

The conceptual model below illustrates the expected interrelatedness of all mentioned variables, followed by a deeper explanation of what each relation entails.

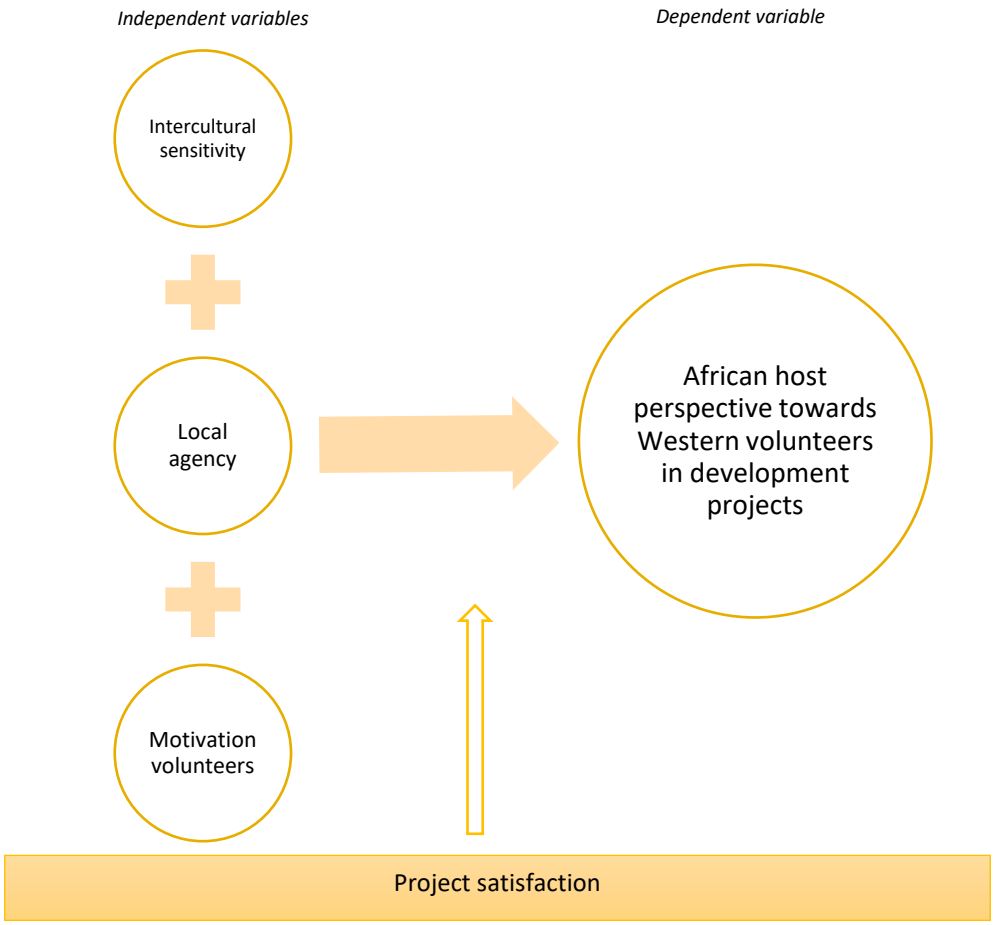


Figure 1 *Conceptual model.*

Concretely, the conceptual model illustrates the expectation that the African host perspective towards Western volunteers in community development projects is shaped by the perceived intercultural sensitivity of Western volunteers, the degree of local agency held by community members, and the perceived motivation of Western volunteers to participate in voluntourism programs, moderated by the degree of project satisfaction that participants indicate.

To start with the independent variables of this model, it is first of all expected that the host perspective towards Western volunteers will be influenced by the way volunteers behave and position themselves in the field and interact with the host community. Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021) show that working in an African context requires cognizance of the social and cultural structures that define host communities, such as traditional entry protocols that relate to existing power dynamics in local communities. Ignorance of such structures impacts cross-cultural interactions. Conversely, however, if attention is paid to the social and cultural structures of the host community, positive development outcomes for all stakeholders involved are likely to occur (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021). Following this line of reasoning, it is expected that the degree of perceived intercultural sensitivity of

Western volunteers impacts the perception of African host communities towards their engagement in community development projects – that is: if the volunteers are perceived to be interculturally sensitive, hosts are more likely to talk in a positive way about their engagement in the community projects.

Secondly, in line with the findings of Mensah, Agyeiwaah, and Otoo (2021), it is expected that the degree to which hosts perceive they have agency in their own process of development affects their perspective towards Western volunteers. More specifically, if hosts feel they have local agency (i.e. control over their own development), they are more likely to talk in a positive way about the engagement of Western volunteers in their community. This idea is inspired by the PRA approach of Robert Chambers[7], that highlights the importance of participatory development, rather than the use of a top-down approach through external measures (Kapoor, 2002). In the context of this study, agency will be measured by focusing on participants' indications of active interaction with volunteers and their own participation in development initiatives, the extent to which they are able to deliver productive work that contributes to the development of their region, their sense of belonging in the community, their feeling of autonomy, and their ability to exercise choice within decision-making at the project level (Hancock, 2017).

Thirdly, it is expected that the kind of motivation community members ascribe to the Western volunteers in their community matters for the way the local hosts perceive them. This idea is derived from Wright (2013), who shows that when hosts sense that volunteer tourists merely have altruistic motivations for participating in voluntourism, their perception towards these volunteer tourists is more likely to be negative. Conversely, if hosts ascribe rather positive perceived motivations to volunteers (e.g. the volunteers see a mutual benefit in their participation, they see the opportunity to learn from the host community, etc.), it is expected that hosts also talk in a positive way about these volunteers.

Finally, the moderating variable of this model, project satisfaction, is expected to influence the relation between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Project satisfaction here also refers to the host perspective towards the organisation of projects, thus including the role of VTOs that are involved in development programs. The line of reasoning behind this is that community members who see the added value of the development program as a whole will also be more likely to talk positively about the engagement of Western

[7] See page 11.

volunteers. On the contrary, if the hosts are not satisfied with the program in general, it is likely that this affects their judgement on the role of Western volunteers in the projects too.

Of course, many factors are related to the degree of project satisfaction indicated by hosts. For instance, it matters whether participants are engaged in the program or not in the first place. Participants who are not engaged might be better at taking a neutral stance towards the projects, whereas participants that benefit from the program might be less likely to raise critical points about it, afraid that it might affect their involvement. Also the kind of development project that is being referred to might be of influence on how the host community perceives Western involvements in community development programs. It is for instance thinkable that practical projects such as helping in the vegetable garden might be perceived differently from supporting disabled children in the community. These and other related aspects will be taken into account when analysing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, to make sure all drawn conclusions are checked for moderating factors.

Perhaps needless to say, yet important to keep in mind, this conceptual model displays only a simplistic reflection of a phenomenon that is more complex in reality. Although all reasoning behind the expected relation between variables is based on findings of prior research, it might be the case that variables turn out to have an impact in a different direction from what the model displays, or intersect with each other. For instance, even though Western volunteers might be seen as motivated, the kind of project they enrol in could still be considered interculturally insensitive by hosts when it is not perceived as fitting within local social norms or cultural customs. The variable ‘project satisfaction’ then directly influences both the ‘intercultural sensitivity’ and ‘motivation volunteers’ variables, even though the conceptual model displays the level of project satisfaction as a moderating variable.

Still, the conceptual model offers a useful tool in structuring the findings of this study. It helps in analysing key concepts and variables in a broader perspective, as well as their interactions. Without too much of steering, a conceptual model guides the research process in a way that keeps the research focus narrow and within the scope of the study. The interview topic list[8] that is used during conversations with participants is an illustration of this, as it derives from the variables that are displayed in the conceptual model. With the conceptual model in mind, key concepts can more easily be identified and the expected relationships between those concepts can either be confirmed or refuted.

[8] See Appendix A: Interview Topic List, page 62.

5. Methods

5.1. Research design

This study aims to obtain more insight in the experiences and perceptions of participants in a field of research that has not been elaboratively studied yet. For that reason, a qualitative research design with data obtained from primary sources was most suited for this research (Boeije, 2010). Rich and detailed data on the way Ghanaian people perceive the engagement of Western volunteers in development purposes have been gathered through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviewing involves the preparation of a list of topics and/or questions based on theoretical exploration (Doorewaard, Kil, & Van de Ven, 2015). This made this research deductive in nature.

Semi-structured interviews have been conducted with both individual participants and in group settings. In both cases, conversations mostly took place spontaneously from walks through the community[9] and approaching community members on the way. This approach helped in first gaining trust from the participant and making sure there is a good ambiance between the participant and researcher. After greetings, small talks and introducing the purpose of the researcher's presence, conversations with participants who were willing and able to talk started. Thus, by introducing the main purpose of the research, the conversation gradually moved from the informal towards the more formal.

The intertwinement of the formal with the informal also occurred during the interviews themselves. For instance, from talking about the research topics, a participant could all of a sudden ask for the researcher's perception on Ghana's local food or football. This created a certain open flow in the conversation and fostered the creation of a safe ambiance. For that reason, formal arrangements such as recording interviews or collecting signatures were considered not to fit this context, out of fear that it might have affected the natural flow of the conversation or cause a certain distance between the participant and researcher. Besides, from participants it became clear that in some cases, community members did not have their own signature. Informed consent was therefore asked and confirmed verbally prior to every conversation, which fitted the context perfectly.

[9] Characteristic for such walks was that instead of taking the main road, tiny paths in between houses have been used to get closer to the community members. *Lungu lungu* means 'going off road' in Twi. Therefore, 'doing lungu lungu' became a way of explaining participants the purpose of the walk, which always led to amused and curious responses.

Sometimes it was the case that neighbours, friends or family members of participants spontaneously joined the conversation, hereby changing the setting from one-on-one interviews to group conversations. Thus, instead of one person, conversations would then for instance end up with four persons. Although such group conversations are different from one-on-one conversations and officially organised focus group discussions[10], there was never the need to interrupt or end it. In fact, these spontaneous group conversations revealed group dynamics and interactions that would otherwise not have been exposed. Sometimes the best, most valuable input was gained from allowing other participants to join the conversation. Of course, the interview topic list was used as a guide line at all times.

Compared to quantitative research, the generalizability of qualitative research is generally low. Generalizability (or external validity) refers to the extent to which the research results can be generalized beyond the research context (Boeije, 2010). This mainly has to do with the sampling technique and the participants that have been included in the study. In this research, in some occasions a snowball technique has been used, in which an initial number of participants is asked for the names of others who will subsequently be approached (Boeije, 2010). This allows for a weaker generalizability, as the participant selection will be less diverse than with a non-purposive sampling technique. Drawing conclusions to larger populations was therefore at all times done with caution.

5.2. Participants and sampling

The sample of this research consisted of adults – here defined as people with an age above 18 years old[11] – living or working in Tinkong. Located in Akropong, in the Eastern Region of Ghana, the village of Tinkong is about 50 km (a two-hour drive by car) away from capital city Accra. Over the last thirteen years, Tinkong has been home to a privately owned development program that offers a variety of initiatives meant to improve the living standard and overall wealth of Tinkong's inhabitants. Before its closing in May 2022, there was a clinic at place that was run by local personnel. Currently, the projects that the development program offers include a microfinance project for small business owners, a day care program for disabled children, a centre for ICT and vocational and technical training, and sports and group activities such as the organization of a big football tournament. During the process of

[10] Focus groups (or group interviews) combine interviewing techniques with discussion under the guidance of a moderator, which allows for the identification of interactive patterns among group members (Boeije, 2010).
[11] According to the Children's Act of 1998 and the 1992 Republican Constitution and in compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, in Ghana a child is defined as a human being below the age of eighteen (Koomson, 2016).

research, the preparations for the official opening of Tinkong's brand new football field were also taking place. This field has been opened in October 2022.

Apart from the running projects, there is also a mortuary at place on the site of the program, that provides an important source of income for the creation of new development projects. In addition, this mortuary is of social value to the community, as its possibility to store the deceased longer in comparison to state-owned mortuaries allows descendants to have more preparation time for the funeral.

The overall aim of the community program in Tinkong is to create sustainable, long-lasting impact on health care, employment, and education for local people. The projects are supported by Western – mostly Dutch – volunteers and interns, that are recruited via Western organizations (e.g. Ontmoet Afrika, GoGhana, Volunteer Correct). Volunteer and interns are here considered as one group, as they usually all do the same kind of activities for the community program. Most of the activities consist of assisting in several of the projects running, based on what is mostly needed and what volunteers prefer to do themselves. The mortuary for instance requires little assistance from volunteers, whereas activities such as joining the local nurses in bringing day care visits to the disabled children, helping out with providing loans to participants of the microfinance program, or working in the vegetable garden several times a week, are well suited tasks for volunteers. These tasks are basically accessible for everyone to join, regardless of prior knowledge. Many of the tasks involve visiting people at home or making walks through the community. Therefore, it is mostly during these activities that interaction between volunteers and members of the host community can take place.

The amount of volunteers at place in Tinkong differs throughout the year. Sometimes the number adds up to ten, whereas during more quiet periods there can be only a few or even no volunteers at place[12]. Also the duration of stay differs per volunteer, ranging from a few weeks to several months. Throughout the research, that lasted for ten weeks in total, one volunteer and two interns from the Netherlands were present in Tinkong. They all went back home in the third and fourth week of the research process.

Participants eligible for interviewing were required to have experience with the coming and going of Western volunteers in their direct environment. Together with the age threshold, this required experience allowed that participants were sufficiently knowledgeable

[12] Obviously, the start of the COVID-19 pandemic at the end of 2019 was an exceptional situation in this regard, as traveling was hardly (if at all) possible back then. Tinkong therefore experienced a long absence of volunteers, that lasted throughout 2020.

and equipped to discuss their perceptions and reflections on the interview topics. Being involved as a beneficiary in one or more of the community development projects in Tinkong was not a strict requirement for participants, as it was expected that non-beneficiaries could also provide useful information and might be more nuanced in their judgement on the Western engagements. Comparing their experiences to the experiences of participants that were enrolled in the development program thus allowed for a broader perspective on the research topic.

In total, 47 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with 49 participants[13]. This number allowed for data saturation. Of these interviews, 39 interviews were one-on-one conversations, the other 8 conversations consisted of group conversations (e.g. conversations with more than one participant). 39 men and 10 women were represented in this study, all with an age of at least 18 years old[14]. All conversations were held in English.

Altogether, the semi-structured interviews allowed for a diversity of insights and experiences, thus increasing the generalizability of this study (Boeije, 2010).

5.3. Procedure of data gathering

To reach participants, a purposive sampling technique has been used, informed a priori by theory. This means that the sample was intentionally selected according to the needs of the study, driven by theoretical exploration (Boeije, 2010). To prevent low response rates, the snowball sampling technique described above has been used as well.

Contact was established in a verbal way, due to the low level of technological interconnectivity available in Ghana's rural areas. Although English is used as the lingua franca in Ghana and the majority of Ghanaians speaks English, not all rural citizens were equipped with this language. Due to the relatively short research period and the limited options available for arranging translators, only English speaking participants have been included in the sample. Of course, this had consequences for the eventual output of the interviews, which is further dealt with in the discussion section[15] of this study.

[13] In some cases, participants who took part in one-on-one conversations also joined a group conversation. This explains the total number of 49 participants.
[14] Unfortunately, due to a lack of complete biodata for all participants a concrete average age is not possible to provide. It is however estimated that the average age is above 30 years old.
[15] See section 7.3, page 49.

5.4. Operationalization and instruments

The central elements of this research were operationalized by means of a topic list[16], that structures the most important concepts deriving from the literature in a way that allows for semi-structured interviewing. All concepts were captured in the conceptual model above, that graphically displays their interconnectedness.

While a topic list offers a useful tool for conducting interviews, it also puts the interviewer at risk of neglecting topics that have not been included in the list. This could lead to relevant topics being overlooked when interpretating the data. Besides, with a theoretical framework in mind, the interviewer could be at risk of being biased, eager on trying to validate pre-existing theories or hypotheses. Semi-structured interviewing minimalized this limitation, as room for topics outside of the topic list was provided if needed.

5.5. Data management

To guarantee a confidential and protective procedure of data management, all retrieved data have been stored on an external hard drive in allocated files. Only the researcher has access to this hard drive. The data are stored only for as long as this is required for the purpose of processing. After completion of this study, the data archive will be deleted.

5.6. Analytical strategy

After conducting the interviews, data-driven analysis started. First, data retrieved from the interviews have been captured into written texts. As interviews have not been recorded, (summaries of) conversations were written down straight after completion of the interviews. Memos were used to make sure no important details would be forgotten.

All transcribed data have been analysed in two coding rounds. First, all relevant information with regards to the key concepts was highlighted and fitted with codes, e.g. labels that depict the core topic of a segment (Boeije, 2010). This was done both in the document of the interview transcriptions itself, as well as manually on paper. Then, all codes were structured by means of colours and subcodes where needed. In this round, possible patterns, overarching themes, and their interconnectedness were captured too. Other relevant impressions, ideas, and thoughts were captured by means of memos, to make sure no valuable information got lost (Boeije, 2010).

[16] See Appendix A: Interview Topic List, page 62.

The preparation of data (e.g. transcribing the interviews and conducting the first round of coding) mainly took place in Tinkong. After that, the interpretation and in-depth analysis of the data started in the Netherlands. This resulted in an elaborative description of the most important findings deriving from the data, leading towards the main conclusions of this study.

5.7. Ethical considerations

In the course of data collection, there were several perceived limitations that might have affected the conclusion(s) of the analyses. First of all, as mentioned above there was a limited amount of generalizability possible, due to the small sample of participants and the qualitative angle from which the research was conducted. This required cautiousness in drawing conclusions about the larger research population of this study.

Secondly, self-reflectivity was important during the research process. In the context of this study, the researcher was at risk of gaining scepticism from participants when it comes to the perceived research objectivity, due to the combination of being both a researcher and an intern for a Dutch organization that recruits volunteers and interns to support the development program in Tinkong. Being engaged in a field of practice that simultaneously functions as the main research focus, the researcher was placed in a rather twofold position. To minimize the risk of facing hardship in gaining trust from participants, the preparation of the interview questions and topic list required thorough sensitivity and reflectivity. This topic is further dealt with in the ethical application form[17].

Thirdly, the issue of misunderstanding due to language barriers in asking questions and engaging with the local community in Tinkong was at stake. Although most participants spoke English well, of course it might have been possible that participants had trouble in understanding the researcher, or the other way around. This then hindered the eventual output of data, and it might have led to different or unintended outcomes of conversations.

Finally, even though it was well considered not to record interviews, this means that not all details of conversations could have been captured, as this is hardly possible to do by heart (especially since some conversations lasted for two hours or more). Although it is expected that no valuable main points or conclusions stated by participants have been lost, it is likely that some parts of conversations did slip away. Luckily, with the use of memos it was still possible to capture many relevant quotes. The most relevant quotes are presented in the results section that follows now.

[17] See Appendix B: Research ethics, page 64.

6. Results

The results following from the interviews are outlined along the most relevant subtopics related to the main question of this research: How do Ghanaian communities that host development programs experience the involvement of Western volunteers in this type of international development cooperation?

The first section of this chapter will start with sketching the current state of affairs in the community of Tinkong in terms of development. Then, section 6.2 is devoted to the political aspect of development by zooming in on both the formal and traditional branch of politics in Ghana. Section 6.3 deals with the perspective of participants on Ghana in comparison to the West, after which their perception on Western volunteers follows in section 6.4. Finally, section 6.5 provides recommendations made by participants when it comes to the kind of development cooperation that is considered to be most effective and sustainable.

6.1. Tinkong and development

Before going into more depth about the involvement of Western volunteers in their community, participants are first asked about their perception towards the development of the region in general. This not only helps in getting a clear view on the current state of affairs in terms of development support, but also in knowing what according to participants development entails.

Starting with the latter, participants mostly define development in terms of labour market opportunities and employment rates. As one participant puts it: “When we talk about development, it is mostly about work”. This participant adds that development should be something that improves or lifts the community by means of financial support. The social, human dimension of development – happiness for instance – will then appear naturally, as according to this participant a higher income is equal to a better life. Other participants add that development has to do with enjoying sufficient facilities around you that add up to the quality of life. This mainly concerns primary needs satisfaction, such as the construction of electricity, water provision, a good health care system, and access to education. A final point that one participant raises slightly nuances the interpretation of the concept of development, as he argues that its meaning changes according to the place you refer to. “It is always a relative subject”, he says. “Here in Tinkong we have less people living on the street or begging for food in comparison to places like Madina [a suburb of Accra]. In that sense, there are also many good things going on over here. It could always be worse”.

Indeed, the general perception among participants is that Tinkong *is* developing, but that the pace of this process is *nkakra nkakra* ("little by little" or "small small" in Twi). There are participants who are positive about the extent to which development takes place. Looking back, they point out several improvements that occurred over the last couple of years. The increase of population together with more housing facilities in the community are among the most commonly mentioned factors. "First, Tinkong was so bushy that I needed a flashlight in order to find my house. Now that so much more houses have been built, everything is way easier to reach", one participant explains. Also the fact that Tinkong has started to attract more people from outside, including foreigners from countries like Togo and Benin, is considered a positive sign of development. Participants assign the population growth to Tinkong's peaceful and quiet character. It is safe to walk around on the street, even late at night, and the air is clean due to the green environment. Positive aspects of development are also visible in practical matters such as the good internet connection and the street lights on some part of the roads, as well as the announcement of the police station and fuel station that are currently under construction (see figure 2 and 3). The coming of the police station also adds to the subjective security in the community, one shop owner explains, as it fosters a feeling of safety.

Figure 2 *Announcement that says: "Site for the construction of police station Tinkong". Personal archive. Taken in Tinkong, June 2022.*

Figure 3 *Announcement for "fuel service station" project by TotalEnergies. Personal archive. Taken in Tinkong, June 2022.*

Also the fact that there are more start-up businesses rising, together with more selling points on the street for local traders, is considered a good reflection of community development and economic growth. With so many products for sale, you do not necessarily have to go to the nearest town in order to go shopping, one participant explains.

Simultaneously, there are also participants who point to the needs and challenges that Tinkong still faces. One of the most commonly mentioned needs is a secondary high school.

Even though Tinkong counts four primary schools and five junior high schools[18], when students want to enjoy secondary high school they now have to travel to places further away. Like elsewhere in the world, Ghana has been affected by higher fuel prices. The costs of transportation are therefore high and place a financial burden on parents who wish for their child to continue education.

Then, also the issue of high unemployment rates is a commonly mentioned concern. Mostly with regards to the youth or students who just graduated from their studies, this problem worries participants. All day long, youngsters are hanging out on the street or "roaming about", as one participant phrases it. The only thing that would help them is more employment opportunities, for instance with the establishment of a big company or business that would allow several employees to find work. "Even if you went to university and you have a good degree, you end up sitting at home because there is simply nothing for you to do", one participant bemoans. Another participant adds that people easily see jobless people as lazy or not willing to work. Yet, the majority of people *wants* to work but simply *cannot* work, he emphasizes. In line with this reasoning, another participant argues that only giving money to those in need is not enough: "If you would give me 20 Cedi straight, I would simply use it to buy food and then it would be gone just like that". What is actually needed, he says, is a way of saving money by means of work opportunities, as currently people already face difficulty in putting even two Cedi aside. Only by means of saving, people are able to move forward independently and build up their own future. Related to this, another participant raises the concern of a decrease in interest in farming among the youth. Even though going to school should be encouraged at all times, this participant acknowledges, the downside of education is that future generations know nothing about farming anymore. With the youth moving away from the agricultural sector, the farmer population then slowly decreases, until there is nobody left to take care of the land. Although this participant does see the benefits in establishing companies or businesses in the region, agriculture should not be neglected in this regard, he believes.

When being asked about concrete examples of improvements that would spur the development of Tinkong, participants come up with a variety of ideas. Some participants refer to recreational facilities, such as investments in creative gatherings with music and sports, the building of a community centre, or the establishment of a restaurant, hotel or swimming pool. Other participants point to rather practical needs, such as better water facilities, a

[18] This includes both governmental and private schools.

supermarket, central selling points for farmers to trade their products, electricity facilities, constructions for rent, or a bank. Only one participant simply says there is nothing more to add to the community, as "we [in Tinkong] have enough". Even though this participant acknowledges the fact that many citizens struggle financially, the fact that there is already much at place in the region makes it unnecessary to invest in more, he states.

When being asked about their own share in the improvement of their region, the way participants indicate to contribute to development differs. Most of them try to do so by offering concrete services to the people. Owning a shop with the aim of expanding it so that it becomes a real supermarket for instance, or hoping to make enough money to be able to invest in real estate, set up a private business, or run a privately owned development organization. Also the aforementioned initiatives for leisure such as the opening of a restaurant, hotel, or pub have been mentioned as ways of attracting tourism to the region. Many participants wish to go abroad first and make money, so that later when they return to Ghana, they can invest in something beneficial to the entire community. Something that will most of all provide people with jobs.

As mentioned above, efforts to spur development by the local government, which involves both the traditional and official authorities, have been made in Tinkong. The police station, streetlights and filling station are the most commonly mentioned facilities by participants. Although these efforts have been praised by the majority of participants, critical perspectives towards the local government have been raised too. As such perspectives are important for understanding the context in which Western involvements and volunteers are perceived, the next section further deals with this political aspect of development. The section is divided among the official and traditional branch of politics in Ghana, the chieftaincy.

6.2. Official and traditional government in Ghana

Talking with participants about the official branch of politics in Ghana often, if not always, results in talking about corruption. Participants blame the government for making false promises in times of election, while in the end "they [politicians] only focus on themselves" and do not seem to care about the people. One participant even describes all politicians as "wicked people" who are only focused on themselves. Poverty and high unemployment rates are used as illustrations for this lack of interest from the side of the government. One participant ascribes Ghana's financially poor situation to a lack of responsibility and discipline among government officials. The reasoning behind this is that public money meant for development purposes always goes through different administrative

layers before it reaches its target group. If no one feels responsible or disciplined enough to manage such financial affairs, investment matters are doomed to fail. “Ghana has so much to offer. Such a rich history”, one participant says. “Yet, without the right investments, it all goes to waste”. This sentiment comes back several times, for instance when the richness of Ghana’s raw materials comes up. “Our commodities are plenty, but because of the government people still suffer from poverty”, one participant argues. At the same time, participants mention the hardness of changing the current system, as in the end “it is all about having connections”. If you come from a privileged family, it is likely that you will enjoy the same benefits as your parents, and that the power remains in the hands of the powerful. This equally applies to Ghana’s labour market. Coming from a non-privileged family, following education will help you to make it a bit further in terms of finding a job. Still, you will most certainly face more challenges than someone who is naturally always one step ahead of you. New elections will not change this situation. “Currently, Ghana has only two big political parties”, one participant explains. “Even if new leaders get elected, their poor way of government remains”.

In fact, Ghana’s political situation got worse over the last couple of years, according to some participants. They indicate to have lost their trust in the government to the extent that in times of elections, they do not vote anymore. One participant points out that the very foundation of Ghana’s political structure is where the true problem lies, substantiating this argument by referring to Article 71 of Ghana’s Constitution. This article is called “Determination of certain emoluments”, and implies that:

> “The salaries and allowances payable, and the facilities and privileges available (…) shall be determined by the President on the recommendations of a committee of not more than five persons appointed by the President, acting in accordance with the advice of the Council of State” (Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana, 1992).

The way this participant sees it, Article 71 enables a small group of wealthy people to call upon this law at any time in order to remain in power and benefit from economic improvements or loans such as the ones provided by the IMF. Indeed, in the time this research has been conducted a new IMF loan has been granted to the Ghanaian parliament, which mostly incited sceptical responses among participants. They do not see the loan as something beneficial to the majority of Ghana’s citizens. Although in theory, an IMF loan could help the country to move forward, in practice only a small group of wealthy people benefits while for

ordinary workers, the situation does not improve. Youngsters even mock with the loan, seeing it as just another pointless effort of the government to change the economic situation in the country. In the end, the situation of unemployment and uncertainty about the future remains. "Without a change of policy, there won't be any change at all", one participant observes regretfully.

Then, there is also the traditional branch of politics in Ghana: the system of chiefs. The official and traditional political system in Ghana coexist peacefully: as long as the chieftaincy acts according to the Constitution, the officials let them be. In Tinkong, apart from the main chief (the king), there are about six to seven subchiefs who inform the chief based on their own particular department. Generally speaking, participants describe chiefs as more caring than government officials when it comes to the wellbeing of Ghana's inhabitants. Chiefs stand closer to the people and therefore know better what challenges and needs are at play in communities, especially due to the function of subchiefs. Participants support this argument by referring to the recent investments in Tinkong, such as the street lights construction. Some participants even wish to go back to the traditional society the way it was organized in the past. "If Ghana would be completely run by chiefs, the country would be better off", one participant strongly believes.

During conversations, it becomes clear that the way participants perceive their political system also affects the way they see Ghana in relation to the West. Generally speaking, the more critical towards their own government, the more convinced participants are of Western standards and ideals. The notion "Ghana is hell" has been mentioned by many participants. The counterpart, heaven, is often used in reference to the West. The next section explains this contrast in more depth.

6.3. Comparing Ghana to the West

"Ghana is not sweet, o!". This phrase has been mentioned by many participants when being asked about life in Ghana. The sentiment mostly resonates in reference to the aforementioned mistrust in Ghana's government officials and the economic challenges that community members face. Ghana is relatively young, one participant explains, but this should not be an excuse for the slow development that it currently faces. Although he acknowledges that just as with human beings, it takes time for a country to develop, he compares the situation to starting a business: "If you just started a new enterprise, you won't sit back and simply wait for it to become successful. You have to learn from others, copy their strategy, and make it your own".

Compared to Ghana, participants envision the Western part of the world as more wealthy in terms of living conditions, overall standard and easiness in finding work. Apart from a few community members that personally know Ghanaians who left their country to go to the West for work, participants mostly reason based on what they see on television or hear on the radio about the way things are being done in the West and the perceived different level of development there. This explains the bright perception that participants have of the West. "You live in heaven, we live in hell", one participant concludes. Participants sometimes even proclaim not to understand why people from the West would come all the way to Ghana for work or studies. "Why would you conduct your research here in Tinkong if you have so much more possibilities back home?", one participant asks. "You would be crazy for even considering living here". Some participants even offer to switch: "If you stay here, I will go to Europe for you".

Indeed, the dream of having a future in the West comes up several times in interviews. For many Ghanaians, their ultimate aspiration is having a "white people" job, which they see as work that does not make your hands dirty the way working on a farm does. They often portray this as "an office job with air-conditioning". Mostly farmers relativize this statement, however, by saying that such comfort is equal to laziness. True hard work comes from working on the farm and sweating from the hot sun, they believe.

Interestingly, also the perceived difference in mentality and mindset when it comes to Ghanaians versus non-Ghanaians is an important appealing factor for the desire to go abroad. Even though Ghana is described as a free country where citizens have the freedom to do whatever they want, Ghanaians themselves are considered to be selfish and eager on "destroying each other" as soon as they see that somebody else has financial success. This "destroying" is related to witchcraft practices, that are still common in many of Ghana's rural areas, including Tinkong. One participant uses a metaphor to describe the mindset of Ghanaians. "Envision this community as a forest", she says. "If you look from a distance, you see a forest. But, if you come closer, you see a tree there and there and there", hereby pointing to imaginary places far removed from each other. In other words, from the outside it seems like community life in Ghana is all about caring for each other and treating your neighbours like family, while in the end people will chase their own happiness and not share in money or wealth. This participant even describes existing relationships as "enemies", even though for outsiders it looks like there is a close friendship between them. Another metaphor she uses to substantiate her argument again points to the perceived egocentric Ghanaian mentality: "If I

would have two dresses and you would have none, I would still not give you one of my dresses. Simply because I like to keep it all for myself so that I have more than you".

The more participants describe Ghanaians as selfish, the more positively they speak of Western people, mostly in terms of being honest and trustworthy, providing support to others, and spending their money efficiently. "Whites do not judge us if we look poor or walk around in the same clothes everyday", one participant reasons. Blacks however change their attitude once they see you are less privileged than they are. "It is not like blacks don't have any good in them, it's just that they don't know how to use it", he explains.

In addition, one participant argues that Western people are more willing to give. He uses land ownership as an example for how this works in reality. "If you give Africans a piece of land, they will not share it with other people. Yet, Western people would use it in a way that allows a large group of people to benefit from it". Another participant uses wisdom to make the same argument, saying that "whites have more wisdom and use it wisely", by helping other people with it. This same participant distinguishes wisdom from knowledge and argues that blacks are the ones with knowledge and whites the ones with wisdom. For him, the difference lies in a certain sophistication that whites have developed due to their higher level of education. This kind of sentiment discloses the ways in which the West is usually portrayed by participants and the kind of assumptions that are attached to it.

Also the way Western people drive competition with each other is seen as something positive. If you and your competitor both strive for the best, you mutually motivate each other to generate the highest profit rather than "bringing each other down" the way Ghanaians do, it is reasoned. Luckily, as one participant nuances, at least Ghanaians fight with each other by means of talking, not by means of attacking or shooting each other. This makes Ghana different from other African countries, even though this participant also refers to Ghana as "hell". The way he sees it: "The only thing we [in Ghana] have is peace". Other than that, the situation is just as bad as in other parts of the continent.

Altogether, the context that has been sketched above helps to place the perception of participants towards Western volunteers in a broader perspective, as it tells more about the way they view the West as a whole. It is to this topic, the local perception on Western volunteers, that the focus will be turned now.

6.4. Local perception on Western volunteers

Generally speaking, when the topic of *obroni's* ("white persons" in Twi) comes up, initially participants mostly share positive perceptions. Yet, listening between the lines, critical sounds appear as well.

Starting with the positive side of the story, it soon becomes clear that the way participants view Western volunteers not necessarily has to do with *what* they do. "It is not about what is being done, it is about who is doing it", one participant explains. This participant bases his argument on his own experience with an *obroni*. When he was younger, a trainer from Norway came to watch a football training of him and his team in Ghana. After watching the training, the Norwegian trainer took the time to briefly talk to the young Ghanaian players and encourage them in what they were doing. Simply because of some motivational words of the trainer ("if you train and work hard, you will make it far"), the whole team got lifted and performed better than ever before in the matches that followed. In fact, three players of that young team are now still playing abroad professionally. According to the participant, this all happened because of the attention that the Norwegian trainer gave to them.

Even though the experience described by the participant is just one example, it does resonate the "one volunteer can positively impact a hundred lives" statement that many community members underscore, especially when it concerns young children who maybe never encountered a Western (white) person in their lives before. It could be the case that when an *obroni* smiles to a child or gives it attention, later on that child will feel inspired and motivated to dream big. After all: "If an *obroni* says it is possible, why wouldn't it be?", one participant explains. Another participant acknowledges that for now, this mostly has to do with skin colour, as Ghanaian children still grow up with the idea that white people are by definition more wealthy than they are. At least it stimulates them, he stresses, but he is also confident that one day it will change.

Also the older generation indicates to feel encouraged in terms of work motivation when seeing a Western volunteer in their community. One participant, who holds an important function as traditional subchief in the community, almost sees volunteers as supervisors that keep control over the situation. Once he sees an *obroni* in the neighbourhood, he feels motivated to keep working on development projects and to make sure the monitoring is taken care of in a good way. He explains this the following way to illustrate the common Ghanaian way of reasoning: "If you give me money to build three houses, I will build one house and keep the rest of the money in my pocket". The presence of people from outside

therefore reassures him. He believes that without the presence of volunteers, money more easily disappears or goes to waste. Another participant adds that just the fact that volunteers travel all the way to Ghana in order to see what life is like over there gives her a confidence boost. Owning a hairdressing business herself, she sees how it helps small entrepreneurs to gradually grow, because they feel the support. “Having volunteers around works motivating. It shows that they care”. Besides, with more volunteers coming, the tourism sector in Ghana can be expanded, meaning that touristic attractions can rise and bring more money to the country.

The aforementioned association of “the good life” that is attached to the West also resonates in the way participants view Western volunteers. In general, community members enjoy the presence of volunteers because they like to be seen with them and befriend them. “It’s always nice to talk with you”, one female participant says to express her appreciation after visiting her. To emphasize the importance of having a follow-up meeting, as part of invitation she delightedly adds: “In Ghana we say that if a woman doesn’t speak for more than fifteen minutes, her mouth will smell when she opens it”.

Another participant who interacts a lot with volunteers for her work acknowledges that the appeal of Western volunteers also has to do with certain status and wealth assumptions that community members have of *obroni’s*. By befriending volunteers, they might get a higher chance of “enjoying the Western life” themselves one day, she explains. The same participant however stresses that also the way volunteers behave matters for the appreciation they receive from the community. Indeed, participants consider the majority of Western volunteers as open, social and friendly, enthusiastic and motivated by a drive to help. This latter point also implies that there is no self-interest at play. “They do it from their hearts, because they care about others”, one participant explains. Sometimes, volunteers even provide financial support out of free will, for instance by contributing to school fees of children who can otherwise not go to school. Help in that sense is considered as something that cannot possibly be wrong. “You are not an island. Help is good”, one participant says, arguing that isolation from external support would not help Ghana in moving forward. “In the end, we all need each other”. Some participants turn the situation around to substantiate this line of reasoning: “If I would come to *your* country to help out and offer support voluntarily, would you consider that as something bad?”.

One participant did voluntary work himself in Ghana in name of his Christian church. Christianity is very influential in Ghana, including in Tinkong where the majority of citizens attends church services several times a week. Some participants therefore see volunteering as

something directed by God, reasoning that "if God sends you here to come and help, that means it is only something good and you should go". The participant who volunteered himself says that despite the risk of people seeing voluntary work as something they can take for granted – e.g. as a form of "free help" – in the end it is an effective way of helping people on a small scale.

Then, there are also participants who emphasize the mutual learning process in volunteering abroad. One participant for instance mentions the importance of reporting about experiences to family and friends back home when volunteering. Indeed, another participant adds, it could spur other Western people to come and visit Ghana. That way, people back home can learn from how things are being done in Ghana and the other way around. "We can teach you *our* knowledge!", this participant says. The use of traditional medicine (e.g. herbs, that contrast modern medicine) or ways of cooking in Ghana are often named as examples of perceived cultural differences between Ghana and the West. Not in spite of, but rather because of these perceived cultural differences we can learn from each other, it is reasoned. After all, we may be different from the outside, but in the end we are equal. An illustration that is often used by participants to substantiate this argument is that "when we cut ourselves, we all have the same blood, meaning that it doesn't matter whether you are black or white"[19]. A couple of participants even start singing the words "one people, different colours" in relation to this, hereby quoting the eponymous song[20] by South-African musician Lucky Dube.

Still, there are also less positive aspects mentioned in reference to volunteers. Speaking from experience, some participants indicate to regret the lack of true interaction between them and the volunteers. When passing by, sometimes volunteers only wave to members of the host community rather than coming closer. "As if they fear blacks", one participant posits. He reasons that volunteers might think that they are dangerous or carry diseases with them. Or, in the case of female volunteers, maybe they are afraid that all black men will propose to them. Another participant believes that volunteers might simply see blacks as different, hereby portraying the lack of interaction as "something racial". He himself also describes volunteers as "other people than we are", hereby equally adhering to the notion of race in his argument. Also the fact that volunteers sometimes do not make an effort at all in

[19] Although this line of reasoning is dominant for many participants, it is worth mentioning that in Ghana it is not uncommon for females to treat their skin with bleach in order to become more *obroni*. "They wanna be like you", a young female explains. Again, this all has to do with the idea that a white skin colour is equal to a higher living standard.

[20] Lucky Dube – Different Colours (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4csXJXHVGA).

trying to pick up the local language is regretted by participants. For them, this is a way of showing respect and interest in another culture. Participants reason that when volunteers stay in a host family, such aspects of intercultural contact can be fostered. As one participant explains: “If you go to places where people never had volunteers coming over and you ask them about their experiences with volunteers, they wouldn’t know what to say. If you never had contact with them, what *can* you say?”.

Still, even if volunteers stay at a host family, cases of miscommunication or misunderstanding arise. One participant argues that this cannot only be ascribed to the side of the volunteer. “Host families need to be educated just as much”, he argues. “They need to learn about the European way of living, so that they better understand the needs and common habits of volunteers”. He uses smoking in the house or inviting friends to come over as examples of how volunteers like to spend their time at home. Such behaviour sometimes clashes with behaviour that hosts desire in their house, such as being calm, neat and complaint with daily household routines. When hosts are better prepared for possible lifestyle differences between them and their guests, the overall experience of volunteers staying in a host family would be more comfortable for both parties.

A final striking point that some participants raise is the fact that in some cases, volunteers seem to visit Ghana with false expectations. One participant for instance shares his experience with a Western volunteer, who told him to be surprised about the fact that people in Ghana “don’t live in trees”. Even though at first this participant laughs while sharing his story, in the end he stresses that he blames the Western media for this. Media spread primitive footage of African countries, he argues, or only emphasize the hunger, diseases or war on the continent. Also NGOs that are active in African countries use such one-sided material for their campaigns, which of course adds to certain influential stereotypes that cannot easily be countered. A side effect of such stereotypes that this participant mentions is that sometimes, volunteers end up feeling lazy or useless, as they expected to do way more than simply “sitting in the back of a classroom, supposedly assisting the teacher”. He blames the responsible NGOs for this, as they need to make sure volunteers actually have something productive to do, in line with what they advertise. Otherwise, the whole point of volunteering goes to waste.

All in all, what participants most of all stress is that in the end, whether volunteers actually make an impact is all about their own mindset. “If you want to help, you will make an impact”, one participant explains. “If you rather come to Africa to have a good time, you will definitely have a good time, but you will not leave an impact”. This participant also adds

that the biggest impact will eventually come from making contact with members of the host community that you are in. This means talking with the locals, listening to what is at stake and identifying possible needs. Only then, you know where you can be of most help and how you can make the impact you wish for as a volunteer. If done the right way, volunteers have a lot of future potential, he believes. With their knowledge and mindset, they have the means to support projects that lift local communities, so that eventually larger parts of Ghana will benefit from it – if not the entire country.

Before moving towards the discussion chapter of this study, the final section of this chapter will deal with recommendations made by participants when it comes to the kind of development cooperation that is considered to be most effective and sustainable. In other words, the kind of development support that according to them would work, and the kind of conditions that need to be attached to it.

6.5. So, what works?

Because of Ghana's political and financial situation as described by participants, many participants see support from outside as crucial to Ghana's future development. Participants for instance argue that without such help, "Ghana would be worse off" and "progress would come more slowly, if not at all". In that sense, Western involvements are considered good and necessary.

Just as in section 6.3, participants almost directly place Western NGOs next to Ghanaian NGOs when making their argument. Reflecting upon Western involvements, participants for instance argue that African NGOs are less capable of building up something solid in comparison to Western NGOs, which makes the impact of African NGOs more local. Western NGOs on the contrary have the capacity to do more and initiate bigger projects. Inevitably, participants reason, this is related to a difference in budget that Western NGOs have in comparison to Ghanaian NGOs. Because of this difference, foreign NGOs are usually not so much attracted to smaller places, as their impact in cities is bigger. Of course, as time passes African NGOs can grow bigger and expand their focus too. Until then, however, external help is considered necessary.

Also a distinction between governmental and private development organizations is often made. Generally speaking, participants see more benefits in having private organizations for development in Ghana than projects set up by big, commercial NGOs. "The combination of being both commercial and focused on charity simply won't work", one participant convincingly states. Another participant adds that even if Ghanaian NGOs claim to be non-

profit, “when money comes into play they always want to benefit”. By contrast, with private organizations help goes directly to those in need and there is no interference from the government. Of course, this sentiment stems from the aforementioned critique[21] on Ghana’s leaders and the mistrust in the country’s government officials. One participant for instance says: “Ghanaian NGOs are still attached to the government even though they don’t claim to be so”. Some participants use the closing of the clinic in Tinkong as an illustration of this, arguing that the reason behind it mostly had to do with government affairs and financial matters. “The government always wants to take over. If they fail, they will make sure to increase the prices for medicine and make them so expensive that community members think the clinic has become an *obroni* clinic. Then, people stop coming”, a former nurse of the clinic argues. For that reason, foreign and private NGOs are considered more independent and less subjected to Ghana’s political system.

Still, also critical sounds towards foreign support are resonating from the descriptions of participants. Chinese investments are for instance considered to be conditional, as there are always “strings attached” to the projects that they install. As an example, one participant describes how the Chinese contribute to construction work and road building in Ghana. Although at first sight this seems beneficial to the country, in the end they want something in return by means of locating their own businesses or selling their products in Ghana to make profit. In other words, as a recipient of aid you eventually lose more than you gain when it comes to these practices. The same participant also observes an increase of Asian rice consumption in Ghana’s domestic market, which he regrets. When people start buying cheap rice from China or other Asian countries instead of locally produced rice from Ghanaian farmers, Ghana’s domestic rice production will slowly stagnate. He therefore warns for the risks that are attached to foreign investments in development projects.

In the same way, some participants express the fear of maintaining a dependency relationship between foreign investors and Ghana. The term “neo-colonialism” has been mentioned by one participant who argues that on the one hand, Ghana cannot move forward without help from outside, but on the other hand, the risk of remaining dependent on such help makes it problematic. He therefore concludes that local engagement should at all times be prioritized when it comes to development programs, which is a topic that comes back in many conversations.

[21] See section 6.2, page 37.

What participants consider as local engagement involves a variety of conditions. It is about "educating people in a way that allows them to do it themselves", participants state. And "making them independent". One participant also sees the active involvement of community members in certain development projects as crucial to the eventual impact such projects will have. "Local engagement is the key to success!". He mentions the construction of the football field in Tinkong as an example. To prepare for the official opening of the field, school children and community members helped with weeding the grass of the field. This yields more appreciation in the end when the field is ready to use, he believes. By letting community members participate in the preparation process of projects, they see the value of it more than when they are simply offered it. They should therefore be more involved in the decision-making process of future projects for community development, or at least be allowed to share their thoughts when new initiatives are being discussed.

He continues that rather than taking over control, local agency should at all times be maintained, meaning that all initiatives for community development should essentially be something that *adds* something to the existing order, rather than *replaces* something. Providing jobs to local people, for instance, instead of placing Western personnel on the ground. Another participant adds that help should fit within the context of a country or community and that it should "primarily be focused on helping people to move forward on their own, [which] also goes for voluntary work". This requires foreign NGOs to not keep control in their own hands. One participant illustrates the risk that otherwise occurs the following way: "If you teach someone how to fish but in the meantime you keep full control over the water and its current, that person will still be dependent on you. After all, without the water, there is no fish".

When local engagement is prioritized and thorough research has been done beforehand to identify possible needs in the community and to really get to know the people who live there, development projects have the potential to increase capacity building and foster long-term independency from any kind of support from outside. This last point means that projects should be sustainable, in the sense that they have a long-term vision. One participant explains this by saying that no matter the kind of project you are talking about, something that you install must be something that people can rely on at all times. Otherwise, you only do a community harm in case a project turns out differently from what you expected. "We will tell you what we need", this participant says in reference to how foreign NGOs can get a better understanding of the situation on the ground. After all, it is reasoned, true change always comes from within. If community members understand the aim and intention of a certain

project, the impact will last because they support it. This requires clear communication from the side of the organization about the general goal of what aspect of development is aimed to be achieved with the initiative.

The implications that all these recommendations have for the practice of development projects in Ghana will be further dealt with in the discussion that follows now. First, however, the chapter starts with presenting the main conclusions that derive from the findings.

7. Discussion

This discussion chapter is structured as follows. The first section is devoted to the main conclusions of this study. Then, both practical and academic implications that follow from the findings are discussed. The third section deals with the limitations that this study encounters. Finally, a brief summing up in section 4 will highlight the main take away messages of this study and provide room for thoughts and reflections.

7.1. Main conclusions

By means of semi-structured interviews, this qualitative study sheds a light on the way Ghanaian hosts perceive the engagement of Western volunteers in development programs in their community. With the purpose of contributing to the perceived lack of knowledge on the experiences of African host communities in such programs, the research has been led by the question: How do Ghanaian communities that host development programs experience the involvement of Western volunteers in this type of international development cooperation? With the conceptual model that this study was built upon in mind, the following conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

First of all, participants indicate to be dissatisfied about their own government, among others due to Ghana's high unemployment rate and the perceived cases of corruption by government officials. Conversely, participants praise the Western world for its perceived wealth, financial management, and honesty. These positive reflections are equally ascribed to Western people and in particular to Western volunteers. Community members in Tinkong indicate to be satisfied with the presence of volunteers in their surroundings, and consider them to be friendly and willing to give. Mainly this last point shows where volunteers distinguish themselves from Ghanaians in terms of mindset and attitude, according to participants. Especially when participants sense a drive to help as the main motivation for volunteers to come to Ghana, participants believe in the lasting impact of their stay. Among others, participants see the impact of volunteers in the way they can encourage young children to go to school and to keep on learning. Also the background of volunteers (e.g. coming from a wealthy country) increases their appeal to participants, as befriending volunteers might increase the chance of pursuing their aspired career in the West. Many of the assumptions made about the West are only based on what participants obtain through media. Therefore, this perception is not always in line with reality and faces the risk of being unsubtly optimistic. Yet, to delve deeper into the issue of false expectations or glorifications about the

Western world, and the consequences this has with regards to actual migration to the West, goes beyond the scope of this research.

Apart from the positive reflections that hosts have towards Western volunteers, at the same time more critical observations underlie this sentiment between the lines. Most notable are the remarks that have been placed with regards to the actual contact that takes place between volunteers and community members. For most participants, interaction with volunteers remains at the surface level (e.g. waving to each other on the street rather than truly talking), which problematizes the actual intercultural exchange that is established. Different reasons are given for this situation, of which a language barrier and reluctance in making contact from the side of volunteers are the most commonly mentioned. Some participants also blame VTOs for creating false expectations about the actual work that volunteers do, as well as keeping stereotypical images of African countries in place by means of advertising. These are all important observations, as it places the positive remarks made by participants in a more critical perspective. Participants do nevertheless not doubt the relevance of help from outside when it comes to fostering Ghana's development. In fact, the country needs it, they reason. As long as the focus of development initiatives by Western organizations (but this equally goes for Ghanaian NGOs) is on the local – that is: fostering local engagement in development projects – such initiatives have the potential to make a lasting impact.

Placing these conclusions in the light of the conceptual model[22] that underlies this study, most of the variables that were expected to have an impact on the dependent variable of this research indeed turn out to influence the host perspective towards Western volunteers. Even though the three independent variables of this study – that is: intercultural sensitivity, local agency, and the perceived motivation of Western volunteers – have a different degree of impact, they are all reflected in the findings.

Intercultural sensitivity is mostly reflected in the way participants indicate a lack of true contact between them and the volunteers. This is not to say that Western volunteers do not internalize the cultural differences that they encounter in Ghana, but it rather shows that cross-cultural interaction is limited because of this (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021), which participants regret. The fact that volunteers not always make an effort in learning the local language is related to this, as participants consider this a way of showing respect and interest in their culture. It can therefore be concluded that indeed, a perceived lack of cross-

[22] See Conceptual and theoretical framework, page 24.

cultural interaction negatively impacts the host perception towards volunteers. The second independent variable of the conceptual model, local agency, is more explicitly reflected in the findings. Local engagement by means of providing jobs to community members and making them actively involved in the preparation of development projects is seen as an important condition to make development initiatives work. This means that foreign NGOs should not replace the existing order in communities or take over control. That way, host communities remain in control over their own development, which is in line with the definition of local agency deriving from the work of Robert Chambers (Kapoor, 2002)[23]. Also the fact that participants appreciate it when volunteers make an effort in learning their local language is related to a feeling of agency, as it is in line with the idea of a reversal of learning (Mensah, Agyeiwaah, & Otoo, 2021)[24]. Then, finally, the impact of the perceived motivation of volunteers by community members also stems from the findings. After all, participants explicitly state that it is not so much about what volunteers do that makes their impact, but rather the fact that they are willing to do it and that they have the mindset to help. The more participants ascribe this kind of motivation to volunteers, the more positively they speak of them in terms of the added value they have to the community.

Project satisfaction, the moderating variable in the conceptual model, was expected to influence the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Yet, in this study this correlation has not been found. Even though participants sometimes express dissatisfaction about certain projects or about decisions made by the development organization in their community (for instance the closing of the clinic), this never affects the way they see the presence of volunteers in their region. Generally speaking, in spite of some projects not working, the presence of volunteers remains valuable for participants.

Finally, even though at first sight the overall experience of community members with volunteers seems positive, the findings of this study reveal that at the same time, there is much underneath this sentiment that is sometimes not even outspoken. In fact, the results indicate that participants do have critical perceptions towards volunteers, but that they slightly disguise this through social desirability or a possible bias towards the researcher in their answers[25]. Besides, the way participants substantiate their argument reveals some of the political tension in the country and the emotionally charged dissatisfaction that community members have towards Ghana's government officials. It also tells more about the way they

[23] See page 26.
[24] See page 20.
[25] This limitation is further dealt with in section 7.3, page 54.

view and relate to each other as fellow Ghanaians, as well as the way they view – or sometimes glorify – the West.

All in all, the story is not as straightforward as it seems, and asks for nuances in drawing conclusions.

7.2. Implications

In terms of implications, both practical and academic implications follow from the findings of this study. To start with the practical implications, this study highlights the importance of transparency and honesty in development practices, mostly when it comes to financial matters. Instances of corruption by government officials are among the most commonly mentioned frustrations by participants, which makes them question the extent to which money meant for development purposes truly goes to those in need of support. Also their lack of trust towards NGOs or private organizations set up in Ghana requires openness about expenditures and an independent system of control. Furthermore, it stands out that local engagement is prioritized by participants in every kind of development project that is initiated. True change should come from within, it is reasoned, so only when local agency is provided, long-term improvements can be made. Finally, the way volunteers are being described by participants asks for ways of improving the contact between them and the host community. Staying in a host family is a relatively easy way of increasing cross-cultural interactions. This would also help volunteers in practicing the local language and in better adjusting to the cultural differences that they might encounter.

Then, when it comes to academic implications, as stated this research contributes to the perceived research gap with regards to the host perspective towards volunteers in community development programs. Still, more systematic research on this topic is needed that helps in gaining more insight in the correlations that are found. Among others, identifying the relationship between a country's political situation and the way its citizens perceive foreign support could be used as an angle to perceive voluntourism from, as the findings of this study reveal that the two are closely connected. Politics should then also be incorporated in the conceptual model, as it turns out that this variable is more than just a bycatch. The perception of participants on Ghana's political situation has a considerable impact on the other variables of this study. In order to better understand this relationship, systematic and longitudinal follow-up studies are needed. Furthermore, a longitudinal research that monitors development initiatives from the start in which volunteers from abroad are involved allows for identifying whether the aspect of time (e.g. the duration of volunteers in a certain community) matters for

the experience of participants with volunteers. The expectation behind this is that the longer volunteers stay, the more they adjust and incorporate the cultural differences they perceive, which ultimately fosters the cross-cultural interaction between them and the host community. Also researching both the host community and volunteers at once could yield interesting connections and allows for a multi-sided perspective on the topic.

Then, with regards to the value of local agency in development programs, comparing private organizations with bigger, commercial NGOs allows to determine whether indeed, as participants reason, the private approach works better in terms of fostering local engagement and in aligning with the identified needs of the host community in such projects. Finally, it would be valuable to conduct research on voluntourism with both African and non-African scholars, so that possible social desirability or a bias in answering could be prevented. In the case of this study, being a Western, white researcher had its advantages and its disadvantages, as is further explained in the section that now follows.

7.3. Limitations

There are several points worth mentioning when reflecting upon the results of this research. First of all, as already announced above it is important to highlight that social desirability and a possible bias in answering might have affected the findings of this research. Being a white researcher, as well as the only white person in the community for most of the time during the research process, it might have been possible that participants only reasoned based on their contact with the researcher, rather than speaking from experiences with the volunteers that they encountered in their community. Although some community members were convinced that being white was beneficial to the research process, arguing that it helps in gaining trust from participants and in retrieving honest answers, it cannot be ruled out that still, there was a certain bias in answering. "You are different from the other *obroni's*", one participant for instance said, hereby explaining that so far she never really had a proper conversation with a volunteer before. Such sentiment is reflected in many conversations. Another participant for instance emphasized how much he appreciated the time that was spent with him for this study and the fact that someone actually listened to his story. Again, this participant never engaged with a volunteer before. Of course, as a researcher having an open attitude and practicing the local language helps in making contact with community members and recruiting participants. Yet, at the same time it raises the question to what extent participants then reason based on their interaction with the researcher or on their experiences with volunteers when they speak positively of Western people. After all, as they never sat

down with a Western volunteer before because of the limited or superficial interaction that they indicated to have, it could be the case that participants only based their argument on the cross-cultural contact with the researcher that was established for this study.

Related to this, another point of reflection on this matter is that sometimes, participants seemed convinced that the researcher was able to solve some of the issues that they encountered in their community, such as the closing of the clinic. They then asked the researcher to do something against it, reasoning that an *obroni* can take care of it. "You people should fix it", one participant for instance said in reference to the clinic situation. This mostly had to do with the perceived financial status of Western people that Ghanaians lack. In relation to this, asking for financial support or other personal favours also happened several times during the research process. This ranged from asking money for medication or buying a new phone to buying treats for young children. Also the request to personally take community members – or only their children – back to the Netherlands after the research process and to provide them with work has been made several times. Seeing certain personal benefits from interacting with the researcher might indirectly be a reason for participants to more carefully formulate their answers (e.g. being more positive about the presence of Western volunteers rather than explicitly raising a critical voice).

Secondly, all participants included in this study speak English, most of them fluently. Yet, interviewing non-English speaking participants might have yielded different perspectives, especially since this group mostly consists of the older generation (to whom following education was not as self-evident as it is right now). People from an older generation know the history of their region better and might also be able to better reflect upon the value of development programs in the community. For future research, including both English and non-English speaking participants would therefore be of added value in order to gain a broader perspective on the community and its members.

Thirdly, as explained in the method section, not all proposed methods have eventually been put in practice. Among others, focus groups have not been conducted, and also the proposed use of informed consent sheets and a recording device during conversations has not been followed. Even though these were all well-considered decisions, the change of methodological strategy might have affected the eventual output of interviews. For future research, it would be interesting to see to what extent a more formal way of interaction indeed changes the way participants see or respond to the researcher, so that more possible biases in answering can be ruled out.

7.4. To be or not to be engaged? Final note

The findings above convincingly indicate that help from outside – concretely the West, in this regard – is considered necessary for Ghanaian communities to further develop. This includes support from Western volunteers. At the same time, however, participants indicate a lack of contact between them and the volunteers in their community. This is a cause for concern. After all, without true contact between hosts and volunteers, cross-cultural interaction cannot take place. Mutual stereotypes, misplaced expectations, or cultural misunderstandings are then more likely to remain (Kirillova, Lehto, & Cai, 2015; Lamoureux, 2011). Also the usefulness of volunteering abroad in general becomes questionable[26].

The way participants speak of Western engagements and volunteers simultaneously reveals that their judgement is not just based on the kind of work that Western NGOs or private organizations do. Mostly domestic political factors, that go beyond the impact of Western volunteers themselves, strongly impact the view that participants have on Ghana as a country, its citizens, and its relation to the West. Glorifications about the Western world, not always too well-founded, keep this perception in place.

As explicitly stated before, this study does not hold a negative stance towards Western engagements in African developmental projects per se. Rather, this study most of all wants to engage in the larger debate that surrounds the field of development cooperation between Africa and the West. It is therefore up to the reader to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of Western initiatives in countries like Ghana. In the end, it is clear that with more research conducted on this matter, the holistic, multi-disciplinary understanding of the topic that this study wants to contribute to can be achieved.

All in all, researching the local perceptions on the development initiatives in the community of Tinkong has been an interesting, insightful, and most of all enjoyable experience. All participants provided a valuable source of information. Their contribution to this study is highly appreciated.

[26] The preface of this study (see page 3-4) provides a good example of the questions that could arise as a consequence of lacking interaction and intercultural exchange between community members and volunteers.

Adams, W.M. (2020). *Green development. Environment and sustainability in a developing world* (4th ed.). London/New York: Routledge.

Adi, H. (2018). *Pan-Africanism. A history*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

African Union. (n.d.). Agenda 2063-SDGs. Retrieved on 2022, May 10, from https://au.int/en/ea/statistics/a2063sdgs

African Union. (n.d.). About the African Union. Retrieved on 2022, September 30, from https://au.int/en/overview

African Union. (n.d.). NEPAD/AU Development Agency. Retrieved on 2022, October 1, from https://au.int/en/nepad

Alolo, N.A. (2007). Fighting Public Sector Corruption in Ghana: Does Gender Matter? In: S. Bracking (Ed.), *Corruption and Development: The Anti-Corruption Campaigns* (pp. 205-220). Hampshire/New York: Palgrave Macmillan. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jon-Cloke/publication/304720559_Governance_Neoliberalism_and_Corruption_in_Nicaragua/links/5890863aaca272bc14be4346/Governance-Neoliberalism-and-Corruption-in-Nicaragua.pdf

Anderson, S.E., Kim, R., & Larios, K. (2017). Voluntourism: The Economic Benefit and Societal Costs of Short-Term Mission Trips. *International Journal of Health and Economic Development, 3*(2), 28-37. Retrieved from https://gsmi-ijgb.com/wp-content/uploads/IJHED-V3-N2-P04-S-Eric-Anderson-Voluntourism.pdf

Ayodele, T., Cudjoe, F., Nolutshungu, T.A., & Sunwabe, C.K. (2005). African perspectives on aid: Foreign assistance will not pull Africa out of poverty. *Economic Development Bulletin, 2*, 1-4. Retrieved from https://www.cato.org/economic-development-bulletin/african-perspectives-aid-foreign-assistance-will-not-pull-africa-out

Bandyopadhyay, R. (2019). Volunteer tourism and "The White Man's Burden": globalization of suffering, white savior complex, religion and modernity. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism, 27*(3), 327-343. doi:10.1080/09669582.2019.1578361

Boeije, H. (2010). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Constitution of the Fourth Republic of Ghana. (1992). Retrieved on 2022, October 10, from https://constitutionnet.org/sites/default/files/Ghana%20Constitution.pdf

Doorewaard, H., Kil, A., & Van de Ven, A. (2015). *Praktijkgericht kwalitatief onderzoek: Een praktische handleiding*. Amsterdam: Boom Lemma.

Dunning, T. (2004). Conditioning the effects of aid: Cold War politics, donor credibility, and democracy in Africa. *International organization*, *58*(2), 409-423. doi:10.1017/S0020818304582073

Dutta, D. (2009). Elite Capture and Corruption: Concepts and Definitions. *National Council of Applied Economic Research, 4*(1), 1-16. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/237917/Elite_Capture_and_Corruption_Concepts_and_Definitions

Escobar, A. (1992). Reflections on 'development': Grassroots approaches and alternative politics in the Third World. *Futures, 24*(5), 411-436. doi:10.1016/0016-3287(92)90014-7

Essien, E. (2021). Strengthening Performance of Civil Society Through Dialogue and Critical Thinking in Nigeria: Its Ethical Implications. In: Information Reso Management Association (Ed.), *Research Anthology on Developing Critical Thinking Skills in Students* (pp. 1494-1515). Pennsylvania: IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3022-1.ch078

Fejerskov, A.M., Lundsgaarde, E., & Cold-Ravnkilde, S. (2017). Recasting the 'New Actors in Development' Research Agenda. *The European Journal of Development Research, 29*(5), 1070-1085. doi:10.1057/s41287-016-0072-1

Felibert Centeno, R. (2020, November 4). Amartya Sen's capability theory approach. *CMI Business School.* Retrieved on 2022, September 30, from https://www.cmiuniversal.com/en/2020/11/04/amartya-sens-capability-theory-approach/#:~:text=Amartya%20Sen's%20capability%20theory%20approach%20is%20a%20theoretical%20framework%20that,terms%20of%20people%20with%20capabilities.

Ferguson, J. (2006). *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Global Crossroad. (2016). What Are The Most Popular Volunteer Abroad Destinations Around The World? Retrieved on 2022, April 3, from https://www.globalcrossroad.com/what-are-the-most-popular-volunteer-abroad-destinations/

Goldin, I. (2018). *Development: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gore, C. (2000). The Rise and Fall of the Washington Consensus as a Paradigm for Developing Countries. *World Development, 28*(5), 789-804. doi:10.1016/S0305-750X(99)00160-6

Gupta, J., Pouw, N.R.M., & Ron-Tonen, M.A.F. (2015). Towards an Elaborated Theory of Inclusive Development. *European Journal of Development Research, 27*, 541-559. doi:10.1057/ejdr.2015.30

Hancock, L.E. (2017). Agency & peacebuilding: the promise of local zones of peace. *Peacebuilding, 5*(3), 255-269. doi:10.1080/21647259.2016.1253604

Hopwood, B., Mellor, M., & O'Brien, G. (2005). Sustainable Development: Mapping Different Approaches. *Sustainable Development, 13*(1), 38-52. doi:10.1002/sd.244

Jolly, R. (2005). The UN and Development Thinking and Practice. *Forum for Development Studies, 32*(1), 49-73. doi:10.1080/08039410.2005.9666300

Kapoor, I. (2002). The devil's in the theory: A critical assessment of Robert Chambers' work on participatory development. *Third World Quarterly, 23*(1), 101-117. doi:10.1080/01436590220108199

Keese, J.R. (2011). The Geography of Volunteer Tourism: Place Matters. *Tourism Geographies, 13*(2), 257-279. doi:0.1080/14616688.2011.567293

Kirillova, K., Lehto, X., & Cai, L. (2015). Volunteer Tourism and Intercultural Sensitivity: The Role of Interaction with Host Communities. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 32*(4), 382-400. doi:10.1080/10548408.2014.897300

Koomson, K.N. (2016, September 22). The rights of children in Ghana. *GRIN Verlag*. Retrieved on 2022, April 3, from https://www.grin.com/document/340676

Lamoureux, K. (2011). Voluntourism: An Overview. In: Honey, M. (Ed.), *Travelers' Philanthropy Handbook* (pp. 99-104). Retrieved from https://www.responsibletravel.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/213/2021/03/travelers-philanthropy-handbook.pdf

Lu, J. (2020, January 13). Why There's A Global Outcry Over Volunteering At Orphanages. *NPR.* Retrieved on 2022, April 4, from https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/01/13/779528039/why-theres-a-global-campaign-to-stop-volunteers-from-visiting-orphanages?t=1649058759794

Masters, J., & Chatzky, A. (2019, April 9). The World Bank Group's Role in Global Development. *Council on Foreign Relations.* Retrieved on 2022, March 31, from https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/world-bank-groups-role-global-development

Mensah, E.A., Agyeiwaah, E., & Otoo, F.E. (2021). Re-conceptualizing volunteer tourism organizations roles: A host perspective. *Tourism Management Perspectives, 37*, 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100785

Mwije, S. (2022, March 29). *Development Actors and their roles* [Video]. Youtube. Retrieved

on 2022, November 8, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9yhH6B7VyEE

Nederveen Pieterse, J. (1998). My Paradigm or Yours? Alternative Development, Post-Development, Reflexive Development. *Development and Change*, *29*, 343-373. doi:10.1111/1467-7660.00081

OECD. (2022). History of DAC Lists of aid recipient countries. Retrieved on 2022, November 11, from https://www.oecd.org/development/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/historyofdaclistsofaidrecipientcountries.htm

Otoo, F.E., & Amuquandoh, F.E. (2014). An investigation into the experiences of international volunteer tourists in Ghana. *Anatolia, 25*(3), 431-443. doi:10.1080/13032917.2014.903377

Palmer, C.A. (2018). Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies, 11*(2). 214-220. Retrieved from https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/JNHv85n1-2p27?journalCode=jnh

Pastran, S.H. (2014). Volunteer Tourism: A Postcolonial Approach. *University of Saskatchewan Undergraduate Research Journal, 1*(1), 45-57. doi:10.32396/usurj.v1i1.30

Richter, L.M., & Norman, A. (2010). AIDS orphan tourism: A threat to young children in residential care. *Vulnerable Children and Youth Studies, 5*(3), 217-229. doi:10.1080/17450128.2010.487124

Rosenberg, T. (2018, September 13). The business of voluntourism: do western do-gooders actually do harm? *The Guardian.* Retrieved on 2022, April 3, from https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/sep/13/the-business-of-voluntourism-do-western-do-gooders-actually-do-harm

Stewart, F. (2019). The Human Development Approach: An Overview. *Oxford Development Studies*, *47*(2), 135-153. doi:10.1080/13600818.2019.1585793

Tomazos, K., & Butler, R. (2009). Volunteer Tourism: The New Ecotourism? *Anatolia, 20*(1), 196-211. doi:10.1080/13032917.2009.10518904

Transparency International. (2015). Global Corruption Barometer. Corruption in Africa: 75 million people pay bribes. Retrieved on 2022, October 5, from https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb/africa/africa-9th-edition

UN Volunteers. (2019, October 15). Promoting Volunteerism and Exchanges in Africa in the

Context of the 2030 Agenda and the Agenda 2063. *UNV*. Retrieved on 2022, May 11, from https://www.unv.org/news/promoting-volunteerism-and-exchanges-africa-context-2030-agenda-and-agenda-2063

Van Dam, P., & Van Dis, W. (2014). Beyond the merchant and the clergyman: Assessing moral claims about development cooperation. *Third World Quarterly, 35*(9), 1636-1655. doi:10.1080/01436597.2014.970863

Vestergaard, A. (2008). Humanitarian branding and the media: The case of Amnesty International. *Journal of Language and Politics, 7*(3), 471-493. doi:10.1075/jlp.7.3.07ves

Volunteer World. (n.d.). Voluntourism Opportunities Abroad. Retrieved on 2022, April 3, from https://www.volunteerworld.com/en/volunteer-abroad/voluntourism

Wearing, S. (2001). *Volunteer Tourism: Experiences that Make a Difference.* New York: CABI Publishing.

Wearing, S., & McGehee, N.G. (2013). Volunteer tourism: A review. *Tourism Management, 38*, 120-130. doi:10.1016/j.tourman.2013.03.002

West, C.C. (2011, April 15). Volunteer Tourism: Effective Development Strategy or Feel-Good Travel? *ProQuest Dissertations.* Retrieved on 2022, April 26, from https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/thesescanada/vol2/002/MR79647.PDF?is_thesis=1&oclc_number=869583857

Wolbert, L.S., de Ruyter, D.J., & Schinkel, A. (2015). Formal criteria for the concept of human flourishing: the first step in defending flourishing as an ideal of education. *Ethics and Education, 10*(1), 118-129. doi:0.1080/17449642.2014.998032

World Population Review. (2022). Western Countries 2022. Retrieved on 2022, April 3, from https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/western-countries

Wright, H. (2013). Volunteer tourism and its (mis)perceptions: A comparative analysis of tourist/host perceptions. *Tourism and Hospitality Research, 13*(4), 239-250. doi:10.1177/1467358414527984

Ziai, A. (2015). Post-Development: Premature Burials and Haunting Ghosts. *Development and Change, 46*(4), 833-854. doi:10.1111/dech.12177

Appendix A: Interview topic list*

Introduction, in which I will:

- Briefly introduce myself
- Briefly explain the topic of my research
- Explain the principle of informed consent
- Ask whether the participant has any questions before the interview starts
- Let the participant sign the informed consent paper (or orally confirm the signature)
- Ask if the participant agrees to start recording

Getting to know the participant:

- Name, age, married, children, etc.
- Occupation/daily activities
- Engaged in development program or not

Perception on Tinkong in general

- Number of years living in Tinkong
- Perception on Tinkong's state of development
    - Who is in charge of development progress?
        - ➔ Own development plans by community? Church involvement? Governmental agencies/institutions at place?
    - What is needed?
    - Where is room for improvement?
- Own share in fostering development

Tinkong's community development program

- Engaged in the program
    - If so: What project?
- Amount of local agency
    - Through interaction with volunteers, own participation, productivity, sense of belonging, feeling of autonomy, exercising choice, etc.
- Project satisfaction
    - Visibility of achievements

    - Possible barriers in progress making
    - Fitting within local context/culture? Why (not)?
        - ➔ For instance: perception towards mortuary (linked to intercultural awareness)

Engagement of Western volunteers

- Experience with volunteers
- Degree of interaction
    - Kind of contact
        - ➔ Daily basis? Conversations?
    - Possible barriers in contact
        - ➔ Language, cultural differences, etc.
- General attitude of volunteers
    - Respectful, interested, open?
- Perceived intercultural sensitivity
    - Aware of social and cultural structures?
- Perceived motivation of volunteers
    - I.e.: why do you think they participate? What brings them here?
- Added value of volunteers
    - Do they make a visible contribution? Do they make a difference?

Ending, in which I will:

- Thank the participant for contributing to my research
- Ask whether the participant has any questions left for me
- Ask whether the participant would like to participate in a final focus group to go through the main findings together and add remarks if necessary
- If needed: ask whether the participant could reach out to other people that fit within the sample of this research

** Apart from the output of the interviews conducted, this topic list will also be used as a guide line for group conversations.*

Ethical Application Form MA African Studies & Research MA African Studies, Leiden University/African Studies Centre

Name: Pleun van der Burg

Student number: s3108767

Email and telephone: p.e.van.der.burg@umail.leidenuniv.nl +31 6 29 81 05 76

Study program: MA African Studies

Date: May 13th, 2022

Project details:

Project title: To be or not to be engaged, *that* is the question.

Country and place for field research: Ghana, Tinkong.

Proposed beginning and end date: June 1st – August 10th

Supervisor 1: Marleen Dekker

Supervisor 2:

Project information:

- Rationale: Please summarise the rationale of the project:

  My research project will study the perception of the host community on the engagement of Western volunteers in development programs implemented in African countries. This study will be conducted through a case study approach of Tinkong, Ghana, where local residents have decades of experience with voluntourism activities set up in their region. The study allows me to give voice to these residents, and learn from their perspectives and thoughts when it comes to Western development engagements through voluntourism.

  In the end, my aim is to answer the question: How do Ghanaian communities that host development programs experience the involvement of Western volunteers in this type of international development cooperation?

- Have you obtained permission to access the research site (e.g. visa, access to archives, …): please specify, if not, explain why not

  To access my research site of interest, I have applied for a visa at the Ghanaian Embassy. The local project office of my internship organization Ontmoet Afrika

will allow me to work in Tinkong and gain access to the residents of the community.

Data collection

- Does the research project have external sponsors? If so, which:
  Not applicable.

- Does the research include unpublished data? Do you have appropriate permission (e.g. archive curator, author's permission)?
  Not applicable.

- Does your research involve participants? If so,
  - Specify which participants and how you intend to recruit them

    Adults living within the community of Tinkong that have experience with Western voluntary programs and the coming of volunteers to their region. Given the requirement of this experience, I expect to work with respondents that are at least 25 years old. I intend to recruit respondents during my internship activities. As I will extend my network by working with local staff and personnel, I expect to engage more easily with the local population of Tinkong and to ask them if they are willing to participate in my research.
  - Specify in what way they will be involved (interviews, observation, focus groups, etc)

    My aim is to conduct both 1-on-1 semi-structured interviews and focus groups with participants.
  - Will you explain to your participants that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time?

    Yes, I will explain this prior to every conversation I have.
  - Will you use audio-visual material, and if so, will you ask consent from your participants to use these techniques?

    Yes. If they do not want me to use audio-visual material, I will make notes by pen and paper.
  - How will you obtain consent from your participants?

    I will make sure to have a written informed consent document that participants can sign. If for any reason this is not possible, I will make sure

to get oral consent before the start of every conversation, which will be recorded and documented.

- Will you treat the data obtained confidentially or not? How will you use it in your written work? Will you make agreements with your respondents?

  I will ask my respondents if they are fine with me describing their stories in a narrative style, and with using quotes if this strengthens the argument I make. Direct quotes will at all times be anonymized, as well as identity indicators such as names. Of course, participants are free to refuse the use of such direct quotes, and they are allowed to withdraw participation even if the conversation already took place.

- Will you debrief your respondents about your research findings?

  I will ask my respondents if they would like to participate in a final meeting (organized as a focus group) to go through the findings of my research so far. Respondents are free to come up with suggestions or adjustments at all times. These remarks will be taken into account during data interpretation.

- Does your research involve specific vulnerable groups such as children, traumatized people? If so, what extra ethical concerns does this raise?

  Most certainly not applicable.

Risk and security:

- Is there any realistic risk to any participant, assistant or helper involved in the project? If so, elaborate

  Not applicable.

Statement:

Write a clear but concise statement (max 1 page) of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.

In the first place, ethical considerations raised by my project have to do with my own position as a researcher. As I want to critically analyse the role of Western voluntary programs and how this is perceived from the African perspective, but simultaneously engage in such a program for my internship, my research puts me in a rather twofold position. I might be at risk of gaining scepticism when it comes to my objectivity as a

researcher, as the community in Tinkong will notice that I will be working for Ontmoet Afrika as an intern. This could lead to hardship in gaining trust from my participants. My own positionality therefore requires me to think in a sensitive way about aspects such as the way I will introduce myself, the kind of questions I will ask, and to what extent I will bring forward my own ethical considerations with regards to my research or not.

A further ethical consideration raised by my research project might concern the openness of participants themselves. Perhaps they feel restricted in talking freely about their experiences, afraid that I will inform this to my internship provider and that their stories can be used against them. Of course I will stress the confidentiality of my research prior to every conversation, but such considerations could still remain.
A way of tackling this could be to mainly ask participants about their general experiences with development programs that have been implemented in the region and to state my questions as open as possible, rather than explicitly focusing on their involvement with Ontmoet Afrika/the Live Now Foundation. This would show the independent position I hold towards my internship activities, and foster trust in my objectivity as a researcher.

Appendix C: Work schedule, deliverables and budget

Date	Planning	Remark	
April 5th, 2022	Handing in the first draft of my research proposal.	After handing in this first draft, feedback will be provided by my academic supervisor Marleen Dekker.	
April 21st, 2022	Meeting with Marleen Dekker based on the second draft of the research proposal.	Feedback will be provided and the progress of the research proposal will be discussed.	*By this time I have booked tickets for my trip to Ghana, apply for a visa at the Ghanaian Embassy, and schedule an appointment at the GGD for information concerning vaccinations and medicines.* → *Based on prior experience, the costs for this are expected to be around 1000-1200 Euros in total.*
April 29th, 2022 at latest	Provide André Leliveld and Akinyinka Akinyoade (teachers of Africa in Practice) with an update on my writing process.	A time and location for my final presentation for Africa in Practice will be scheduled.	
May 2nd, 2022	Attend the pre-departure Health and Safety meeting provided by Leiden University.	Attending this preparation session on health, security and cultural awareness when going abroad is required in order for students to go abroad for study-related activities. Leo Harskamp, the head of Security and Crisis Management at Leiden University, informs students on how to prepare their stay and travel safely.	*In May, I will attend all sessions of the Communicating Research course. As I still need to gather my data, I will not be able to complete all assignments that are needed to finish this course.*
May 3rd, 2022	Meeting with Marleen Dekker based on the third draft of the research proposal.	Feedback will be provided and the progress of the research proposal will be discussed. I will work towards the finalization of my research proposal.	

May 6th, 2022	Handing in the fourth draft of the research proposal.	Feedback will be provided by Marleen Dekker. When finished, I will share the final version of the research proposal with André Leliveld and Akinyinka Akinyoade, to get their approval too.	
May 13th, 2022	Finalization of the research proposal.	The proposal will be shared with André Leliveld and Akinyinka Akinyoade, and also submitted to Brightspace.	
May 30th, 2022	Final presentation for Africa in Practice.		
May 31st, 2022	Final meeting with Marleen Dekker before the start of my research internship in Ghana.	Ideally, I have finished Africa in Practice by this time, by handing in my research proposal and doing my final presentation.	
June 1st, 2022 at latest	Deadline of applying for the Sustainable Humanities Internship Fund provided by Leiden University.	MA African Studies students receive a lump sum of 1250 Euros.	
June 1st, 2022 – August 10th, 2022	Going into the field: Research internship in Tinkong, Ghana.	During these ten weeks, I will gather my research data and conduct my internship for Ontmoet Afrika. I will start making notes based on my findings during this process.	
After arrival	Once returned, I will work on the results and conclusion section of my thesis, and rewrite the introduction, theory, and methods section where needed.	From this moment on, new appointments with Marleen Dekker will be scheduled in order to keep track of the writing process of my thesis. I will draft a timetable in weeks in which I will define all deliverables per stage, plan how I will deal with the data I collected (e.g. coding, data analysis), and how I will finish my first/second/final drafts of the thesis (including	*In compliance with Mirjam de Bruijn and Karin Nijenhuis (teachers of Communicating Research), I will proceed with the assignments that are needed to finish the Communicating Research course.*

		finalization by means of language and spelling checks).	
December 31st, 2022	Preliminary deadline of my eventual thesis.		