

## **Making a Difference? Good Practice in Volunteer Tourism.**

**Eliza Raymond – *Graduated 2007***

### **Abstract**

Volunteer tourism is generally seen to provide a more reciprocal form of travel, in which both the volunteer and the host communities are able to benefit from the experience. However, short-term volunteer programmes are increasingly being criticised, not only in the media, but also within academia. It has been argued that such programmes do not always involve a mutually beneficial experience and may even represent a form of neo-colonialism.

Despite such criticism, there has been little attempt to examine what can be done to ensure that short-term programmes do benefit all those involved. Although authors have highlighted the need for more effective management of volunteer programmes and have begun to make suggestions as to what this might entail, little academic research exists focusing specifically on the role of sending organisations in volunteer tourism. This thesis addresses this gap by exploring the potential benefits of volunteer tourism and, subsequently, developing a framework of good practice for sending organisations.

The findings from this research suggest that volunteer tourism has the potential to benefit both volunteers and host organisations, as well as lead to a number of broader benefits. However, if these benefits are to be achieved, it can no longer be assumed that volunteer tourism is somehow inherently 'good'. Rather, sending organisations need to consider a number of issues when developing their programme, as well as before, during and after the programme. It is argued that it is critical for sending organisations to recognise the importance of deliberate planning and careful management if their programmes are to represent an 'alternative' and mutually beneficial form of tourism.